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## **THE CHRISTIAN EAST**

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1954

# **THE CHRISTIAN EAST**

*THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
AND INDIAN CHRISTIANITY*

**NICOLAS M. ZERNOV, D.PHIL.**

**S·P·C·K**

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***THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO***

**MAMEN MAPPILLAI (d. 31st December 1953),**

**E. JOHN PHILIPPOSE (d. 23rd February 1955),**

**and the Rev. K. PHILIPPOS,**

**who introduced me to the Orthodox Church of Malabar**

**and taught me to love it.**

***Pathanamthitta:***

***London: Oxford.***

**NICOLAS M. ZERNOV**

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\* Good photographs of the interior of an Orthodox Church can be found in *The Liturgy of the Eastern Orthodox Church* by Hamilton Maughan (Faith Press, London, 1916), pp. 48, 49.

## P R E F A C E

THE author of this book spent ten months in Travancore in the academic year of 1953–1954, having been invited by the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar to be the Principal of the Catholicate College in Pathanamthitta.

Most Christian visitors to India come into contact with its Church life through the door of one or other of the Western confessions. The author's way was through the little used Eastern Christian channel, which was congenial to his own background.

His experience of life and work in Travancore, as well as his contacts with other parts of India which he made during his lecture tours in the North and in Ceylon, convinced him that both Christian and Hindu circles in India ought to know more about that Eastern tradition of Christianity which is the religion of a large number of people inhabiting Western and Northern Asia and the Eastern half of Europe. Hence this attempt to explain its main features.

The author wants to express his thanks to the Rev. K. C. Joseph and the Rev. C. A. Abraham of the Syrian Orthodox Church for their help in writing the chapter describing their traditions, and to the Rev. K. Philipos for providing photographs for the illustrations. He is most grateful to the Rev. James Stuart of the Cambridge Brotherhood who proposed the plan of the book, and made many suggestions for the improvement of the text. The author is also greatly indebted to Mrs Essex Lewis of Bristol, who assisted him in the preparation of the manuscript.

Some of the chapters of this book have been incorporated from another of his publications, *The Church of the Eastern Christians*, and he has also quoted from his other work, *The Reintegration of the Church*. He wishes to express his thanks to his publishers, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Student Christian Movement Press, for the permission to make use of these books.

*Oxford,*

NICOLAS M. ZERNOV

*February 2nd, 1955*

# I

## INTRODUCTION: INDIA AND THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

THE history of the Church in India is different from its history in all other nations. On several occasions the Christian message has been brought to the Indian people, and each time it has met with eager response from some of them. But invariably it has happened that the initial success was not followed by steady progress. The forces of opposition were always able to resist the spread of the good news, and until the present day Christianity has remained the religion of a small minority among the Indian people. At the same time the seed which was sown in Indian soil has never lost its vitality and power, and those who have seen the Christian truth have retained their vision.

These successive periods of advance and stagnation have no exact parallel in the experience of other countries. The Church in other lands either spread gradually among their inhabitants until it became the recognized religion of all their people, as was the case in Greece, Italy, and in other countries of Europe; or else it made good progress at first, but then succumbed to inner dissensions and so was paralysed and reduced to a condition of impotence, as happened in Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. There were also countries like Persia, Central Asia and China, where persecution and foreign invasions destroyed all traces of Christianity, until this religion was once more revived in the 19th century.

In India the Church moved along its own path. It could neither break through the wall of opposition, nor could it be suppressed altogether, and these conditions have applied equally to those Christian communities which owed their origin to the missionary efforts of India's Asiatic neighbours, Syrians and Persians, and to those which spring from the more recent endeavours of European and American Christians to convert India to the religion of the Crucified and Risen Lord.

Many complex reasons are responsible for the unique position occupied by the Church in the life of the Indian people. Some of them are rooted in the character of Hinduism which has so profoundly affected the mentality and the conduct of its adherents. Others have to be sought in the history of the country, which is both open to all the winds of the world, and yet is surprisingly self-contained and isolated. Still other reasons are connected with the peculiar character of the Church itself, as it has been presented to the inhabitants of this sub-continent.

With the exception of the original mission of St Thomas the Church has come to India in its divided state. Christians from abroad have brought to the people of India the splinters of the one-time united Christian community, strongly coloured by diverse confessional and national associations. The Eastern Christians, the Latins, and various Protestant denominations and sects in their separation, have tried to win India's allegiance to Christ, and to persuade her sons and daughters to accept the unique truth announced to the world by the Gospels.

Their efforts have so far had only a limited success, and it is probable that Indian Christians will not be able to achieve much progress until those who are separated

find their reconciliation, and thus become cured of their one-sidedness and limitations. Only by the joint efforts of the representatives of the Eastern and Western traditions can the true character of the Universal Church be revealed to the seekers after truth among the Indian people. India's great gift is its capacity for seeing the underlying oneness behind the quickly moving and constantly changing phenomena of temporary life. Its thinkers and sages have sought to reconcile systems of thought and varieties of religious experience which appear incompatible to other nations, and cause bitter conflicts in their midst. There is therefore a particularly striking contrast between the inclusive character of Hinduism and the disrupted state of Christianity as known to the Indian people.

The missionaries, instead of presenting to Hindus or Muslims the universal message of salvation, speak to them with conflicting voices, and can only acquaint them with interpretations of Christianity in one or other of its Western versions. It is no wonder therefore that the Church looks so foreign and so Western to the majority of Indians, who find it difficult to realize that every race and nation has its own unique place in the society of Christian people. India is not an exception to this rule, though her people have not yet found their proper place in the life of the Ecumenical Church.

Their country however occupies a key position in Asia today. It stands on the cross roads from the East to the West and from the North to the South. Europe and China, Iran and Central Asia, Indonesia and Arabia have all contributed to the growth of Indian culture and in many cases have received powerful impulses from their contact with it.

India gave birth to many religions which spread outside its own limits. In return it became a fertile ground for

religions conceived far away from its borders. It is therefore significant that it has also been the field where the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity have met each other, clashed with each other, and have been influenced by the Indian cultural climate. It is therefore conceivable that India may act as a mediator in the agelong rivalry which has caused such grievous losses to the Church all over the world; it could thus make its greatest contribution to the rest of Christendom.

This little book about the Eastern Christians is written with this expectation. It aims at giving a brief account of the most important characteristics of the Orthodox, comparing and contrasting them with the Western expressions of Christianity. It is intended for the rank and file of the Church, and therefore is more descriptive than theoretical. The author hopes that a better knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox approach to the Church will facilitate the formation of a United Church of India, which will combine the best elements of the Western and Eastern traditions and interpret them in the light of its own ancient culture. Great are the spiritual treasures inherited by the Indian people, such as the deep wisdom of their sacred writings; the refinement of their art; the charity and hospitality of the common people; and the ascetism of the elect. These achievements can benefit not only Asia, but also all other nations, and it is through the Church that India can best share them with its near and far off neighbours.

Christians all over the world need the help and inspiration of a vigorous Church of India. At the same time, the Indian Christians ought to know more about the life of the Church in other countries. The Church of Christ is the great family of redeemed people, in which all

members are assisted by the gifts of others, and handicapped by their shortcomings; for only together can the Christians grow into the fullness of Christ, whilst in their separation they become victims of impotence and decay.

## II

### THE SCHISM BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN EAST AND WEST

THE New Testament community was born in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The small group of Christ's disciples gathered round His Mother received the grace of the Holy Spirit and the commandment to preach the Good News to all nations. The infant society, with a surprising vigour, began to branch out in all directions. Christian congregations soon appeared in most centres of the Jewish dispersion, both within and outside the Roman Empire. This association between the Church and the synagogue did not, however, last long. The Christians quickly outgrew the narrow confines of Judaism and began to spread far and wide all over the Mediterranean world, and even beyond its frontiers. Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, North Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Italy, Greece, and some parts of India, became dotted with small but intensely alive and ever expanding Christian congregations. At the beginning of the 4th century, in spite of repeated attempts at their suppression made both by the Roman and the Persian Empires, they reached such a numerical strength and displayed such spiritual vitality, that the all-powerful Emperor Constantine (A.D. 305-336) offered to the Christian religion the same state recognition and protection which was traditionally enjoyed by the Pagan cults in the lands controlled by the Romans.

The momentous decision of the great ruler radically altered the position of the Church. Its further expansion was accelerated on the one hand, but on the other hand new dangers and rifts appeared within its body, which adversely affected its growth, and in some places even led to the decay and ultimate disappearance of Christian communities.

In order to understand the causes which contributed to these defeats, it is necessary to mention briefly the changes in the relation between Church and State within the Roman Empire which occurred in the 4th century.

The Church was from the beginning an international and classless society. It welcomed in its midst people of every race and social standing, but although those who joined it were made members of a new closely-knit community, they did not lose their national characteristics. They worshipped the Holy Trinity in their own tongue and brought into their new fellowship many of their old customs and local peculiarities.

One of the most difficult tasks confronting every social unit is to maintain peaceful co-operation between diverse national and linguistic groups within its orbit. The early Christians were able to make a considerable advance even towards that goal. Their communities were often the only place where men and women of different races and nations were able to meet each other as brothers and sisters, as members of the same family. Nevertheless with the growth and expansion of the Church the national tensions and social rivalries rapidly increased, and the Christians found themselves less and less capable of dealing effectively with these disruptive forces.

Christian regeneration through baptism does not deliver men from the seductive power of sin, but they are endowed with additional strength to oppose its temptations.

The early Christian communities were not therefore composed of sinless people, but of men and women who were able to wage a victorious campaign against their passions, the selfishness and weaknesses of the flesh, more successfully than pagans. They could do this however, only as long as they remained faithful to the precepts of the Gospel and obeyed the rules of mutual love and forbearance. But the growing wealth accumulated by the Churches and the worldly power acquired by the leading prelates made the latter arrogant and neglectful of their pastoral duties, and this in turn considerably lowered the high standard of Christian fellowship.

The chief cause, however, which undermined the resistance of the members of the Church to evil in the 4th and 5th centuries was the introduction of compulsion into their corporate life.

The Christian Church first appeared in history as a fellowship of self-governing communities. There was nothing enforced about their unity; it arose organically from a deep realization, shared by all its members, that they belonged to the same body, since they had all been born into the same new life. But from the 4th century, when these Christian communities received the protection of the Emperors, their constitution underwent a radical change: they lost their independence and became subject to the control of the State. Formerly, if any dispute arose within the Church, it had been settled by negotiation; but once the patronage of the Empire was granted, the Emperors began to use their political power to maintain unity among Christians, often inflicting severe penalties on those they deemed to be in the wrong.

The Emperors' intentions were praiseworthy; they wished to preserve peace and concord; but their methods were those of the old unredeemed world, and the results were

fatal. The more they tried to suppress by force the disagreements among Christians, the more bitter the conflicts became, until at last the Church was split up into several hostile bodies. These schisms were usually caused by national and temperamental divergences among members of the Christian Church, but once the spirit of mutual charity had been lost, differences in doctrine also made their appearance, as the divided Christian Churches fell into one-sided interpretations of the faith.

The first serious split occurred at the beginning of the 4th century in North Africa, the so-called Donatist schism. The Christians there belonged to two national groups. One group was formed by the natives of Africa, the other by the descendants of the Latin colonists from Italy. In temperament and outlook on life they were sharply opposed to each other, and a local dispute about the election of a bishop gave rise to a nation-wide conflict. State intervention only aggravated matters, and both sides fell victim to such an animosity that in the 7th century the Church in North Africa vanished altogether, consumed in the flames of fratricidal struggle and undermined by the disaster of barbarian invasions.

In the 5th century similar conflicts arose in Egypt and in Syria between the Greeks on one side and the Copts and Arabs on the other. The so-called Monophysite schism was provoked by a theological argument in regard to the best definition of the Incarnation. The Greeks, in agreement with the majority of Christians, described the God-man Jesus Christ as 'one Person having two natures', divine and human. The Copts and the Arabs preferred to speak about Him as having 'one Divine-Human nature' (*monē physis*). This theological debate acquired the character of open warfare owing to the national rivalry of the two parties. It had even more

destructive consequences for the Christians than the Donatist schism, for it facilitated the conquest of Syria, Palestine and Egypt by Islam, and handicapped the spread of the Christian light for centuries in the rest of Asia and Africa. Simultaneously with this schism the Christians of Persia and Mesopotamia broke off relations with the Byzantine Church and asserted their independence (the Nestorian schism). The same was done by the Armenians for mainly political reasons.

These quarrels, harmful as they were, did not however affect the main body of Christians, who tenaciously clung to their unity, firmly believing that there could be only one Church and one Empire. The members of the Catholic Church, whose main centres were located in the basin of the Mediterranean, but whose offshoots could be found also in Western, Northern and Eastern Europe, were subdivided into five Patriarchates—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. As long as all of them remained in communion with one another, the Christians were able to benefit by the diversity of gifts bestowed upon them, and this was particularly important as far as the relations between the Greeks and the Latins were concerned, who were the two leading nations among those converted to Christianity. Unfortunately the disputes and schisms of the 5th and 6th centuries prepared the ground for the next disastrous event in the history of the Church, the breach of communion between Rome and Constantinople. This occurred at the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era.

The distinction between the Greek and the Latin mentality can be traced back to the origins of Christianity. The Greeks excelled in speculative thinking, they were theologians and artists; the Latins were good administra-

tors, interested more in the practical running of the Church than in the subtleties of doctrinal definitions. The Greeks had a special love for the beauty of worship; the Latins valued discipline and order. The Greeks emphasized the diversity of gifts, the Latins the need for unity and obedience. Though the Greeks and Latins were close neighbours and belonged to the same geographical area, they incorporated in their outlook certain achievements and limitations which are traditionally regarded as typical of the Eastern and Western mentalities. Rome, the old capital of the Roman Empire, and Constantinople, the new capital which was founded at the meeting point between Europe and Asia by the first Christian Emperor Constantine in 321, became the centres and the symbols of the Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

Rome and Constantinople were both friends and rivals, who fought together for the purity and orthodoxy of the Christian faith, and laboured for the spread of the Gospel among pagans, while each at the same time carefully watched the other's movements, fearing the increase of its prestige and power.

Until the end of the 8th century, both cities were part of the same political organization, and this factor helped considerably the maintenance of the fellowship between their hierarchs. It was not always easy for them to understand each other. They often viewed the Church's tasks from opposite standpoints, and this led at times to a breach of communion between them. But the schisms invariably ended in a reconciliation, for both sides acknowledged that the Church of Christ must include both Eastern and Western Christians, and that their gifts were complementary the one to the other.

The first serious split between Rome and Constantinople took place in the ninth century. Its immediate

cause was the irregular appointment of a new Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius (d.898), but its real origin lay in the great political conflict which occurred at the beginning of the century, when, in the year 800, Charlemagne restored the Western Roman Empire. In the eyes of the Greeks, the Pope had committed a serious breach of faith when he consented to crown a barbarian like Charlemagne as Emperor of the West. It is true that the Byzantine ruler was obliged to recognize the intruder as his brother-sovereign, since he had no power to oppose him, but the Greeks strongly resented this concession. Thus two rival political powers had been set up, both claiming to be the only lawful successor to the Roman Empire, and it was merely a matter of time before one or other had to be destroyed. The bitter conflict between these two competitors, which ended with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century, involved the Church also, and was thus the root cause of the schism between the Christian East and West.

The leading rôles in the ever-growing struggle fell to the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Under the strong political influence of the rival Emperors, the occupants of the most important sees of Christendom started a feud, seizing on every pretext in a campaign of mutual calumny and recrimination. The Patriarch Photius first produced a catalogue of Western heresies which included:

- (1) fasting on Saturdays in Lent;
- (2) beginning Lent on Ash Wednesday instead of on a Monday;
- (3) disapproval of married priests;
- (4) objection to confirmation administered by a priest;

(5) the unlawful addition to the Creed of the words '*Filioque*', 'and the Son', when describing the 'procession' of the Holy Ghost.

The Latin Church retorted by producing a similar list of Eastern heresies. A lively controversy arose which gradually increased in bitterness and volume till the catalogue of heresies included more than fifty topics. Every difference in custom or teaching, which in the past had been regarded as a legitimate expression in religion of the differing Eastern and Western outlooks, was now treated as an outrage. The most debated of these divergences were:

- (1) the question of the *Filioque* clause (see above);
- (2) the belief in a Purgatory distinct from Hell;
- (3) the use of leavened or unleavened bread at the Eucharist.

It would, however, be a great mistake to think that these disputes between Pope and Patriarch had seriously affected the bulk of Christians. Their sense of oneness was so strong that it took more than 400 years to destroy it. The first breach between Pope Nicholas and Patriarch Photius was eventually healed: the quarrels of their successors were also brought to a peaceful end; and when, on July 16th, 1054, the Papal Legate excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, no one had any idea that this was the beginning of a schism which would last for many centuries. Its immediate cause was a trivial local dispute over the control of Latin monasteries in Constantinople. Much bad feeling was displayed on both sides, but neither was yet ready for permanent schism. The excommunication itself was a highly irregular and irresponsible action, for it was launched at the time when the Papal Throne was vacant. Pope Leo IX (1048-54)

had died early in the year and Cardinal Humbert, the author of this attack, issued it on his own initiative. As a matter of irony the momentous excommunication has never even been confirmed by Rome.

The Emperor Constantine IX (1042-55) tried to appease what appeared to him to be a local and temporary quarrel between an obstinate Patriarch and an aggressive Latin Prelate. He sent back the legates to Italy with many gifts, hoping that the new Pope would restore peace and communion between Rome and Constantinople; but political events in Italy frustrated these expectations.

The Normans, who at that time were extending their conquests over Sicily and Southern Italy, were determined to prevent any reconciliation between Byzantium and the Papacy, and they succeeded in their object. Their constant attacks on the territories of the Eastern Empire, undertaken in the name of the See of St Peter, kept hostility and suspicion alive for the next two hundred years. Yet, in spite of this political tension, proposals for the termination of the schism were continuously made during that period.

The consummation of the split between the Christian East and the West occurred only after the coming of the Crusaders.

The heroic and romantic elements in this attempt to deliver the Holy Places from Islam still make it difficult for Western people to realize the disastrous character of the movement. Yet the harm it did was so great that some of the most bitter conflicts of our own time can be traced back to the mistakes of this well-intentioned but ill-advised enterprise.

The chief evil of the Crusades was the belief that military aggression can serve the spread of Christianity, and that the sword can sometimes be more efficient

than the word in the presentation of the Gospel. They lent support, too, to the idea that to rob, torture, or murder a man whose religious beliefs were erroneous was not only permitted but even approved by Christian teaching. The Orthodox East, when it heard about the Crusades, felt apprehensive from the very start. The Byzantine Empire held that her army was entrusted with the sacred duty of defending her frontiers, and that Christian soldiers who laid down their lives in the battle against the infidels and barbarians had made a righteous sacrifice for a cause approved by God. But this was very different from the idea that Christian monks and soldiers, whose homes and families were not threatened, were justified in taking up arms and starting to kill others in far away lands, in the name of the Christian religion and for the sake of controlling the land where the Saviour of mankind had lived and died and risen again.

These doubts and forebodings developed into open hostility when Eastern Christians came under the rule of the Crusaders. War is always a brutal and destructive affair, and the Crusaders did not differ much from other soldiers. When a city was captured its population usually suffered, and it would have been too much to expect that a careful discrimination would be made between the local Christians and Moslems. Everybody was helpless before the invaders, and his life and property were at their mercy. Once the rule of the Crusaders was firmly established it proved of no advantage to the Eastern Christians, even when compared with their bitter experience under the Moslem yoke. In many cases it was even a change for the worse, for their former conquerors had been more tolerant than the Christians of the West, and had allowed the Orthodox to continue their Church life unmolested. But the Crusaders tried to convert the

Orthodox to Latinism, confiscating their church buildings, imprisoning their clergy and treating them as though they professed a wholly alien religion.

The growing animosity between the Greeks and Crusaders flamed up into open conflict at the end of the twelfth century. In 1185 the Knights captured and sacked Salonika, the second largest city of the Byzantine Empire; they conducted themselves with such complete disregard for the sanctity of Christian churches, that horror and indignation overwhelmed the whole of the Christian East. Contemporary Greek historians describe how the drunken soldiers danced on the altars of Orthodox churches, how the sacred vessels and the reserved sacrament, together with the ikons, were made the objects of the most revolting abuses, and how the corpses of men, women, and children were profaned by the conquerors. The Greeks were staggered by the scenes of deliberate cruelty and sacrilege, for the Moslems, their inveterate enemies, had always showed a genuine respect for places of worship.

The sack of Constantinople on April 13th, 1204, dealt the final blow to brotherly relations between these two branches of the Christian Communion. It was an occasion of plunder and destruction seldom equalled for horror, even in modern history. The great city, which had remained unconquered ever since its foundation in the fourth century, contained unique treasures of Christian art and learning. This was also the place where all the great relics of Christian piety had been stored by the Emperors. The riches of its churches, and especially of its Cathedral of St Sophia, were unsurpassed in the whole world. Soldiers and Latin clergy vied with each other in their attempts to seize some part of these riches for themselves; even the precious Holy Altar of

St Sophia was polluted, broken in pieces and sold. Most of it was, however, simply lost or destroyed, and only meagre remnants reached Europe.

Greek writers could not find words adequate to express their disgust and exasperation at the sight of such plundering, and their descriptions found confirmation in the epistle of Pope Innocent III, addressed to his Cardinal in Constantinople. The Pope's denunciations of the sacrileges committed by the Crusaders bear out the statements of Greek writers.

This day, April 13th, 1204, marks the end of the fellowship between Eastern and Western Christians. This means that the split was caused, not by quarrelsome theologians or ambitious prelates, as is usually suggested, but by the greed and lust of those men who, in the name of the Prince of Peace, had embarked upon a war of aggression and conquest.

The horrors of the sack of the great Byzantine cities brought about a radical change of attitude among the ordinary members of the Church. Up to this time the feeling of competition between the Christian East and the West had been confined to a few prelates and to the narrow circle of the Court. The mass of Christians had recognized the oneness of the Church, and therefore all ecclesiastical disputes had sooner or later been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. But after the aggression of the Crusaders a deep sense of indignation spread all over the Christian East. The bulk of Church members refused to treat the Westerners any longer as their brethren in Christ. During the course of the next two centuries the secular and ecclesiastical rulers of the Byzantine Empire, under the rapidly growing threat of the Moslem domination, tried hard to come to some understanding with the Christian West. At Lyons in 1274, and at

Florence in 1439, reconciliation between the bishops of Rome and Constantinople was achieved; but it came to nothing, for the Eastern Christians stubbornly refused to enter into communion with the offenders. After the outrages of the Knights it was the Eastern laity which became the stronghold of opposition to reunion, and all efforts on the part of prelates to bridge the gulf proved a complete failure.

Whatever had been the mistakes of the past, undoubtedly in the last and fatal stage of the disruption of Christian unity the East was the victim and the West the aggressor. The conduct of the latter during the succeeding centuries was the logical result of their particular rôle in the quarrel. Somewhere in the depths of its conscience the Christian West has retained a memory of the crime it once committed. Ever since that time it has been troubled by the very existence of the Christian East; it has frequently been tempted to resume negotiations with the Orthodox Christians; it has tried hard to force them to accept its leadership and to exchange their traditions for Latin or Protestant forms of Christianity. It has employed cajolery, promises and threats; it has calumniated the Orthodox faith and practice and attacked the Eastern Church whenever possible; it has never been able to leave the East alone, and both the Roman and Protestant Churches have displayed a striking similarity in their conduct.

The line taken by the Eastern Christians was the very opposite: they refused to pardon the offenders; they were unable to swallow the insult and take part in a reconciliation. Resentful and embittered, they displayed a complete indifference to the fate of Western Christians, and had but one wish—to be left alone. They ceased to recognize any moral link between themselves and the Christian West, and considered the Latins as idolaters who

worshipped the Pope, and Protestants as still worse, since they had elevated the Book to the position which should be occupied by Christ alone.

A study of the relations between East and West during the last 800 years is a sad business. Both parties wilfully persisted in their errors; one side was arrogant, the other unforgiving. The West tried hard to induce the East to submit; the latter remained firm in its refusal to open its heart and mind to those who had formerly been brothers, but had violated the bond of peace and love. In the past it has been the custom of both Eastern and Western theologians to blame their opponents for the loss of unity and to refuse to accept their own responsibility for this breach of communion. It was inconceivable that a split of such importance could be motivated by any other reason than a grave case of heresy. Such a deviation from doctrinal truth was usually sought in the addition or omission of the words 'and the Son' ('*Filioque*' in Latin) in the Nicene Creed. This point of disagreement is important, but it existed at the time when Eastern and Western Christians were still in fellowship with one another, and therefore it is not the real cause of the schism. As we have seen, the gradual alienation between Rome and Constantinople was fostered by cultural divergency, linguistic difficulties, political competition and the general tension between the Eastern and Western temperaments. The peculiarities of doctrinal interpretations and of ecclesiastical organization became accentuated by these secular disagreements, and in return provided the necessary weapons of attack for those who worked for the disruption of the Church.

It is common both to Eastern and Western Christians, as long as they are animated by the spirit of incrimination, to point out the disastrous consequences of the schism

for their former companions and to overlook entirely the price which they themselves have had to pay for the same wrong action. The Eastern Christians see, for instance, the over-centralization of the Roman Church and the abuses which accompany it, as the inevitable result of the Roman breach of communion with the East. The one-sided development of Latin theology and liturgical practices, which led to the Reformation and the loss of unity among Western Christians, are also traced back to the same split. The Romans on their side ascribe to the influence of the schism the stagnation of Eastern theology after the 15th century, the undue submissiveness of Orthodox hierarchs to the secular power, and the general paralysis of their thought and action.

In reality both sides have suffered grievously, and their quarrel has adversely affected every sphere of their life. It is time for both of them to stop accusing each other and to seek the ways of reconciliation. The first step towards this goal is the impartial study of their similarities and contrasts, and the following chapters intend to give a picture of the present-day life of the Eastern Church, comparing it with the customs and outlook of the Western Christians.

But before we leave the subject of the schism, we must raise the question of what relevance the events described in this chapter can have for India and its people. They took place in parts of the world far removed from this sub-continent, and at a time when there existed hardly any contact between Rome and Constantinople on the one hand and India on the other. Yet they also had an important repercussion in the life of the Indian people. As a result of the schism between the Eastern and Western Christians, in recent centuries the message of the Gospel has reached India, not in that balanced form in which it

was received by those nations which were converted to Christianity prior to the split, but in a one-sided and impoverished form such as was common both to Eastern and Western Christians after the loss of their unity. Instead of enjoying the richness both of the Eastern and Western interpretations of Christianity, India has become the victim of their suspicions and misunderstandings. Many of the seekers after truth among its people have been prevented from having any real encounter with the challenge of the Gospel, because it is presented to them in an exclusively Western way, tainted by hostility to all that was typically Eastern.

The reconciliation between the Christian East and the West is one of the vital problems for all nations. India is no exception. Indian people have suffered in the past because of the schism; they can greatly benefit by its termination.

# III

## THE ORGANIZATION AND MISSION WORK OF THE EASTERN CHRISTIANS

THE Christian West has always been better organized and more disciplined than the Christian East.

The latter has never been able to compete with Rome, for instance, in the excellency of its highly centralized and efficiently run army of celibate priests, of monks and nuns, or with the Protestants, with their world-wide societies for missionary and educational work.

The Eastern Christians have always been strongly attached to their local customs and national peculiarities, and as the result of this they have developed a system of church government which combines a sacramental fellowship with wide autonomy in all spheres of church administration. The majority of the Eastern Churches today form a federation of self-governing bodies called 'autocephalous' Churches. Their ruling principle is the belief that each nation should form its own Church, and that all these national units should enjoy complete equality and freedom within the great family of the Eastern Orthodox.

These Churches display a great variety both in type and organization. Some comprise as many as 100 million members (such was the approximate number of Orthodox Christians in Russia before the Revolution); others contain only a few thousands and in one case (the Church of Sinai) only one hundred. Some of these bodies may be poor and oppressed, while others may be prosperous and may enjoy both freedom and prestige. But all are equal

in status, and no decision can be taken in the name of the Eastern Orthodox Communion, unless it is reached by the free consent of all its constituent members.

Each self-governing Orthodox Church is independent in its internal administration; it can use for its worship the language of its choice, and can follow its own customs and traditions. There is no central authority; the Patriarch of Constantinople holds the first place among the heads of the self-governing Churches of the Byzantine tradition, but has no right to interfere in their affairs, unless his services are asked for.

The constitution of the Eastern Orthodox Church is not unlike that of the Anglican Communion, with one important difference; the former comprises such a mixture of nationalities that it is not associated with any one in particular, while the latter, in spite of its widespread missionary work, is still predominantly a Church of English-speaking peoples.

The correct name for all this great body of Eastern Christians together is 'the Orthodox Church of the East', and such terms as 'the Greek Church', 'the Russian Church', denote only the various branches of that international federation of Churches.

The Eastern Churches, from the point of view of their doctrinal allegiance, are divided at present into two unequal groups. The vast majority of them form the above mentioned block of Byzantine Churches, which are all in close fellowship with each other and with the ancient See of Constantinople. Besides this main body there are two other groups of Eastern Christians which split from it on national and doctrinal grounds in the course of the 5th and 7th centuries, and continue until today their separate existence.

Of these two the one which is by far the larger in size is called the 'Oriental Orthodox' group. Its main doctrinal distinction from the Byzantine Orthodox consists in its rejection of the Chalcedonian Council of 451, which described Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, as having two natures, divine and human. The Oriental school of theology prefers to use the expression 'one divine-human nature', and hence derives its name, *Mono-physite*.

The other dissenting group is the small remnant of the one-time flourishing Church of the Persian Empire, which broke its fellowship with the Byzantine Christians in A.D. 620 mainly for political reasons. Their doctrinal tendency was in an opposite direction to the Monophysites, and they were inclined to draw too wide a gap between the divine and human natures of Christ. They are usually called the *Nestorians*, because they refused to subscribe to the condemnation of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 451) who was accused by the Council of Ephesus in 431 of holding heretical views on the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Eastern Orthodox Christians of the Byzantine tradition are subdivided at present into the following self-governing ecclesiastical organizations; the Patriarchates of Constantinople (5,00,000), of Alexandria (1,20,000), of Antioch (2,50,000), of Jerusalem (50,000), of Russia (10,00,00,000), of Rumania (1,50,00,000), of Jugoslavia (70,00,000), of Bulgaria (50,00,000). The Churches of Greece (70,00,000), of Georgia (25,00,000), of Cyprus (3,60,000), of Albania (2,50,000), of Poland (?), of Czechoslovakia (1,50,000), of Finland (80,000), of Hungary (40,000), of Japan (30,000), of Sinai (100).

Besides these Churches, the Eastern Orthodox of the Byzantine rite have their dioceses in Western Europe,

in North and South America, in Australia, Central and South Africa and in China.

The minority of the Eastern Christians which is not in communion with Constantinople consists of Armenians (25,00,000), Copts (20,00,000), Ethiopians (80,00,000), Jacobite Syrians (80,000), the Orthodox of Malabar (7,00,000), and the Nestorians (50,000).

Apart from these two main groups there are some 80,00,000 Eastern Christians who acknowledge the Infallibility of the Pope and are incorporated into the Roman Communion. They have preserved in most cases the Eastern tradition of worship, modified however under the influence of Latin customs. These 'Uniates' display various degrees of westernization in accordance with the length of their submission to the Papal rule. Those of them, like the Maronites of Lebanon (3,50,000) who have been under Rome since the time of the Crusaders (1182), have lost almost all the signs of their Eastern origin; other Uniate Churches, especially those which were started in the 20th century, are still indistinguishable in their ceremonies from the Orthodox.

Altogether some 16,00,00,000 Christians belong to the Eastern tradition. Compared to the 40,00,00,000 Roman Catholics of the Latin rite, some 15,00,00,000 Protestants of different denominations, and 5,00,00,000 Anglicans, they are therefore the second largest group of Christians next to the Roman Catholics.

Various Orthodox autocephalous Churches are organized and administered in different ways, but they all have dioceses presided over by bishops. Each diocese is subdivided into parishes, which are in the charge of priests, assisted by deacons. Various Church Societies exist among Eastern Christians for the promotion of missionary, educational, philanthropic and youth work,

in which the laity as a rule take not only an active but a leading part. While the presidency in the celebration of the sacraments is reserved to the clergy, teaching and preaching are open to lay people, and the Eastern Church has always been distinguished by a great number of outstanding lay theologians.

The parish clergy are usually married, but Bishops are celibate, and are recruited from either monks or widowed priests. The methods of appointment and training of clergy and bishops differ considerably from one Church to another. In some countries, as for instance in Greece, the parish priests are selected by the parishioners and some of them receive no special training; in others, such as Rumania, they are all expected to have theological degrees.

In some places the Church is free to govern itself, while in others the State keeps a careful watch on its activities and constantly interferes in its administration. The constitution of the Eastern Church is based on the principle of self-government, in which both clergy and laity share. Parochial councils, diocesan conferences and national synods must all include their elected representatives. But this constitution is not always adhered to in practice. When it breaks down, it is usually as the result of State intervention. The popular character of Eastern Orthodoxy is the source of its strength; for this reason whenever the secular authorities have wished to check the influence of Christianity, they have tried to suspend the Church's constitution and deprive the laity of any part in its administration. Russia, before the Revolution of 1917, was a conspicuous example of this policy.

From the time of Peter the Great's reforms in the 18th century, the Empire of St Petersburg, on the pretext

of official protection, exercised a rigorous control over all the activities of the Church. Lay people were deprived of their traditional right to elect their own clergy and to discuss their Church affairs at parochial and national councils. The Church was constrained to silence, and attempts to speak in its name on the part of clergy or laity were punished.<sup>1</sup>

In the 19th century the same policy was continued, and up to the very last moment the St Petersburg Government refused to allow the Russian Church to convoke a council. Only after the fall of the Empire in March 1917 was the all-Russian Council at last summoned in Moscow. It met in August of that year, after an interval of more than two hundred years, its last predecessor being the Council of 1681. It restored the proper constitution of the Russian Church, and gave to the laity its share in ecclesiastical government, thus preparing the Russian Christians to weather the storm which broke upon them as soon as the Communists seized control of both capitals, Petrograd and Moscow, in October 1917.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, under the rule of the Roman Catholic Poles, the Orthodox Christians in the Ukraine had to face a similar situation. The Government there used every available means to undermine the authority of the Church and induce the Orthodox to submit to Rome. The stronghold of resistance was found in the laity, organized in brotherhoods, which defended their traditions so vigorously that they frustrated the designs of the Polish rulers. The latter therefore did

<sup>1</sup> The best known victim of this 'Imperial supervision' was Bishop Arseni of Rostov, who was starved to death in 1769 on the orders of Catherine II (1762-1796) for his attempts to defend the Church's independence; he was not the only martyr of that reign.

their best to eliminate lay people from the administration of the Church, hoping that the clergy, deprived of their support, would yield.

These expectations were justified, and it was the bishops who were the first to desert their own Church and go over to Rome. This betrayal on the part of the Episcopate did not however destroy Orthodoxy in the Ukraine; the failure of the '*Unia*' was entirely due to the popular spirit of the Eastern Church, which made it possible for the laity to ignore the decisions of the majority of their own bishops, and thus preserve their traditional faith and worship. During the long centuries of Moslem oppression in the Balkans and the Near East, it was again the close co-operation between clergy and laity which saved the Orthodox Church from extinction; indeed, this principle is one of the foundation stones on which rests the whole edifice of Eastern Christianity.

A few words about the missionary work of the Eastern Christians have to be added to this short description of the constitution of the Orthodox Churches.

Christians belonging to the Western tradition often declare that Eastern Christians lack missionary zeal, and on this ground assert their superiority over the Orthodox Churches. This statement is the outcome of inadequate information and lack of understanding of the local conditions under which Eastern Christians have lived in many parts of the world during long centuries. The general missionary record of the Eastern Christians is in no sense less glorious than that of the West.

In the course of the first four centuries the Eastern Christians brought the message of the Gospel to such remote countries as Ethiopia, Arabia, India and Ceylon. In the 7th and 8th centuries the Christian religion spread all over Central Asia and reached even China in 635.

In the 9th century the Church of Constantinople sent to the Moravians in Central Europe two outstanding brother-missionaries, St Cyril (d. 869) and St Methodius (d. 885). Their apostolic labours, though opposed by the German bishops, were crowned with the successful conversion of the Slavonic peoples. In the course of the 9th and 10th centuries Serbians, Bulgarians, Dalmatians and Macedonians embraced Eastern Orthodoxy. The Russians, who were converted at the end of 10th century (989), at once began systematic missionary work among their eastern and northern neighbours. They persisted in these endeavours even under the Mongol yoke (1240-1480). It was during that time that one of the greatest Russian missionaries of the Middle Ages, St Stephen of Perm (d. 1396), converted to the Christian faith the Finnish tribe called Zyriane.

Russia's expansion beyond the Urals and into Siberia started in the 16th century, and was accompanied by steady missionary activity. Their greatest expansion took place in the 19th century, at the time when the Western Christians also revived their missionary zeal.

Most of the famous Russian missionaries of that time were also outstanding linguists who translated the Bible into the languages of the various Siberian and North American tribes. Fr Makarius Glukharev (d. 1850) evangelized the region of the Altai in Siberia. Bishop Innocent (d. 1879) was for forty-four years a missionary in Kamchatka, the most easterly peninsula of Asia, and in Alaska in North America, whence he was recalled to the Metropolitan See of Moscow in recognition of his exceptional work in the cause of Christianity. Bishop Nicholas of Japan (d. 1912) founded a flourishing Church among the Japanese people, which became during his own lifetime self-supporting and self-governing.

Missionary work was not confined to the clergy alone, and several laymen played a prominent part in it, such as Nicholas Ilinsky (d. 1891) the leading missionary to the Moslems in Russia. His knowledge of languages was prodigious; he spoke Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Tatar, Cheremis, Chuvash, Kirgiz, Mordvin, Yakut and several other Asiatic languages with such perfection that he was able to undergo a full course of tuition in the famous Islamic Academy of Cairo, where no one suspected him of being a stranger. This unique experience (for he was the first Christian able to do it) later helped him considerably in his work among the Moslem peoples. His excellent translations of the Bible into all these languages won many converts for the Church.

Such is a brief record of the missionary work of the Eastern Church. What is then the reason for the persistent statements that the Eastern Christians are not missionary-minded? There are several explanations of this. First of all, much of their missionary work was destroyed by the Muslims. China, Japan, Central Asia, Tibet, Northern and Central India, Persia and Arabia, once Christianized by Eastern missionaries, lost all traces of Christianity till the Western missionaries resumed their preaching in those parts of Asia. Secondly, their more recent successful missionary work was confined to the Russian Empire, a part of the world little known to most Western writers. Thirdly, the Eastern Christians who lived under Muslim rule—and such were most of them until the 19th century—were forbidden by Islamic law to engage in any proselytizing activities. Anyone of them who dared to convert a Moslem to the Christian faith was executed together with the convert. Many Western missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries who came to work under the protection of the Western

powers in Muslim countries, did not realise that they enjoyed privileges and an immunity which were denied to the native Christians.

This factor applied also to the Syrian Orthodox Christians of Malabar. They lived under local Hindu rulers and were restricted by custom and government control from taking part in missionary activities, but the Western missionaries were free from all these impediments. The Orthodox Christians in Travancore-Cochin State have lately started missionary work, but they could do this only when the political conditions in their State had altered. These missionary efforts brought many thousands of new members into this oldest Christian community in India, and are a proof that under equal conditions Eastern Christians have the same ability as Western Christians to bring the light of the Gospel to those who have not yet seen it.

Finally, the conviction that Eastern Christians are incapable of spreading their faith arises out of the feeling of superiority, so common in the past among Western Christians. Many of them took it for granted that the Eastern Christians were not capable of being missionaries, and those who were convinced of it did not take much trouble to verify how far their assumptions were corroborated by the objective facts.

The task of preaching the Gospel to all nations has been equally accepted by the Eastern and Western Christians. Both of them had their victories and their defeats, but one thing emerges with clarity from the study of this history, that the nearer they come to each other, the greater is their success in this field, and the more they quarrel among themselves, the less convincing is the voice of their preaching.

In summarizing this chapter one can say that the Eastern

Christians, as far as their organization is concerned, occupy the middle position between the Romans and the Protestants. They share with Catholic Christians the episcopal organization of the dioceses, but they invite the laity to take a responsible part in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, as is common among the Protestants. They are in communion with each other as the Catholics are, but the freedom and self-government of their national Churches remains more like the independence of Protestant Confessions than the centralized Roman monarchy.

They have more in common with Anglicans, as far as their constitution is concerned, than with any other Western Confession, and this similarity in organization reflects a general similarity in outlook, which is one of the remarkable features of Anglican-Orthodox relations.

# IV

## THE WORSHIP OF THE EASTERN CHRISTIANS

WORSHIP is the most essential element of every religion. It is there that its devotees receive their inspiration and purification, enter into communion with divine power, and manifest their fundamental convictions about the relations between the Creator and His creation. There is therefore no better way of understanding any religion than through acquaintance with, and (if possible) participation in, its sacred rites.

The same applies, of course, to the study of various traditions within the Christian community.

The contrast and the similarity between its Eastern and Western interpretations can best be seen when their worship is compared; and this comparison ought to cover not only the ritual of the Eucharist, but also the style of churches, their internal and external decorations, the conduct of the services by their priests, and the part played in worship by the lay people.

Such studies of the liturgy express in a most revealing way the beliefs, hopes, and prejudices of the Christian worshippers.

The terms 'Eastern' and 'Western' Christians, when used in connection with the study of worship, need some qualifications. There are some Eastern people, like many Chinese or Indian Christians, for instance, who are brought up in the Roman Catholic or Protestant tradition, and therefore liturgically belong to the West. There are also some English, French and Germans, who are members

of the Eastern Orthodox Church and represent the Christian East. There are also cases where some Eastern Christian communities through their submission to Rome have lost almost all traces of their Eastern tradition, like the Maronites of Lebanon, for example. Other Churches, though they adhere still to their original rite, have borrowed so much from their neighbours that they cannot be treated any longer as its authentic spokesmen.

In general, it is impossible to find any confession which represents the Christian East or the West in its purity; even to draw a clear line of demarcation between them is not always easy. Yet the distinction between them is a very real one, and in order to realize it, one needs to attend two church services expressing each of these traditions.

Let us compare, for instance, the Russian Orthodox and the Anglicans, as two Christian bodies which conveniently display the typical features of the Eastern and Western approach.

Anyone familiar with Church life in England and Russia is bound to be struck by the divergency in the presentation of the Christian religion of these two countries.

The churches in Russia with their flame-shaped cupolas, bright colours and glittering crosses, contrast sharply with the massive, austere fabrics of English cathedrals and parish churches. The innumerable pictures of saints and angels that cover the interior walls and even the ceilings of the Russian churches, the high screens that conceal the altar and the celebrant from the worshippers, create a very different atmosphere from that in English churches, where every religious symbol is exposed to the congregation, and the ornaments are restrained and few. Besides these differences in decoration, Russians are unrestricted in their movements, either by pews or by custom, and behave with a freedom and spontaneity

which is sometimes surprising to a disciplined and conventional English mind.

Such contrasts are not to be explained only by national temperament, climatic conditions and historical and cultural associations. An English visitor to a Russian church becomes aware of meeting an interpretation of Christianity which is novel and to some extent questionable to him; and a Russian Christian at an Anglican service realizes that the stiffness of the laity, the relative lack of colour and dramatic movement in the worship, and the prominence of the pulpit, expresses a tradition distinct from and at times antagonistic to his own.

What then is the root cause of the difference between these two ways of worship? Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation, of union between heaven and earth, time and eternity, God and man. Its main affirmation is that the Divine and the human can be made one without discarding their nature, or losing their identity. This is achieved, not because God and the world are the same, but because God is the Creator, and the world is His creation, and the Creator is the absolute Master of His own work. He loves it, and desires the most intimate fellowship with the beings endowed by Him with the power of free choice.

The Christian East and West stand in complete agreement with one another as far as these fundamental convictions are concerned. They teach that man, as the crown of creation, is called to act as a link between God and the world, and, moreover, that he is capable of promoting or retarding concord and co-operation between the Divine and creaturely wills. Eastern and Western Christians, however, begin to part company when they attempt to define more exactly the rôle assigned to each human being in this Divine-human encounter.

They visualize differently the relation of the individual to the community, of matter to spirit, of time to timelessness.

Where they diverge is not so much in their understanding of the Person of the Incarnate Lord, as over the practical consequences of the Incarnation, when worked out in the historical development of the Christian community. This means that the doctrine of the Church rather than the Person of Christ is the main field of controversy between East and West.

Anglicans, together with other Western Christians, begin with the individual. The ray of the Divine Light, when it touches the earth, illuminates for them first of all the unique value and the high responsibility of each man and woman made in the image of God. A reborn person is, for them, the cornerstone of the new order. The Christian Church is the fellowship of individuals who are called to live the Christian life together. This body is distinct from the rest of the world; it stands in opposition to temporal kingdoms, and proclaims the supreme power of the Spirit over matter and flesh. The redemption itself is conceived in the West as man's liberation from earthly bondage, and the history of the Church is interpreted as a never-ceasing struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world. Every moment of time must be redeemed by being so intensified that it can be brought into touch with the realm of unchanging values and so made part of Eternity.

In the East man is seen primarily as a member of the community. Those who live in peace and love among themselves become the mirror of the Holy Trinity, the reflection of the heavenly light. Man grows into a person when he realizes his interdependence with his fellow-members in the Body of Christ. The Church is the

Divine grace operating among the redeemed people; Christians are those who have responded freely to the call from above; they are not separated from the world, but on the contrary form its sacred heart. Through the Church God brings about the regeneration of nature, of beasts and men. Spirit and matter are two manifestations of the same reality, and when they are sanctified and made the temple of Indwelling Grace, then their past, present and future join together, and time stops its flow as it merges with the ocean of Eternal life and light.

These distinctions, subtle as they may appear, have deeply influenced the presentation of the Christian faith in the West and in the East, and consequently have affected worship, social organization, and even political conditions among these nations.

This fact can be illustrated by examples taken from their religious art, customs, and liturgical traditions. For instance, the flame-shaped cupolas of the Russian churches<sup>1</sup>, with their bright arresting colours, proclaim the regenerating power given to the Christian community. They announce the coming transfiguration of the Universe, and they preach that even now the earth is changed into paradise whenever the Eucharist is celebrated and Divine grace is received through men's corporate action.

The austere architecture of the Western churches symbolizes the conflict between two hostile realms; but even while asserting that Christian forces cannot be defeated, the battlements on the grey walls remind members of Christ's army that the struggle is hard, that the enemy is strong, and that the victory cannot be obtained without endeavour, suffering and sacrifice. This militant aspect of Western Christianity is however, mellowed by another

\* <sup>1</sup> See the illustration, facing p. 38.

message, beautifully expressed in the lofty and serene spires, which tell of man's longing to leave this earth behind, with all its turmoil and temptations, to be liberated from all material concerns, to reach the celestial regions of sinlessness and peace.

The interior decoration of Eastern and Western churches also express eloquently these two interpretations of Christianity. The Orthodox temples represent heaven and earth joined together in an indissoluble union. The sanctuary, divided from the rest of the building by the screen<sup>1</sup>, is heaven with its holiness and mystery; it is always there, and yet it is inaccessible to sinful man as long as he remains in his isolation; and therefore the doors leading into the sanctuary are always closed except during the service. They are wide open however, when Christians are gathered together in obedience to Christ's commandment, and in faith, love, and fear, begin to celebrate the Eucharist. Then heaven illuminates the earth, and God meets His creation.

The screen, with the figures of the Incarnate Lord, His Mother, and the Saints painted thereon, express the conviction that man is both the wall of partition and the uniting link between the heavenly and the earthly. The Royal Doors with their pictures of the Annunciation, and of the Four Evangelists, declare that Christ alone is the Door leading to communion with the Holy Trinity.

The interior of Western Churches corresponds with the teaching that man must be continuously assisted from above in order to make progress along the right path. The churches represent the stations where Christians are recharged with energy and resolution to fight the good fight to the victorious end. The altar and the pulpit

<sup>1</sup> See the illustration, facing p. 39.



The Church of St. Basil in Moscow



The Interior of a Russian Church with  
the 'Royal Doors' open

supply the mystical and intellectual food distributed by the shepherd to his flock. The pews, filling up the main part of the church, regiment and at the same time split up, the congregation, helping them to concentrate upon their decision, thus stressing the personal responsibility of each member of the church militant. This individualistic approach to religion is equally strongly revealed by the way in which Western, and especially Protestant, services are conducted. They are generally led by one individual, usually the ordained minister, on behalf of other individuals. In its ideal, every word spoken and every act of the celebrant, is done in such a way that each member of the congregation can easily follow it and benefit from it. Accordingly the service is well timed, it has a clearly marked climax, it keeps every member of the congregation busy singing hymns, reciting psalms, listening to the lessons and sermon, or praying.

The behaviour of Western worshippers is, as a rule, strictly uniform. Everyone follows the lead of the officiating clergy, and the laity stand, kneel or sit at the same time and together. Western Christians are usually disciplined and punctual; everyone attempts to reach church before the service is due to start, and no one leaves the building before it is terminated.

The Eastern Christians behave differently. First of all, they see the priest only occasionally; during many parts of the service he remains behind the screen and is neither visible nor audible to the lay people. The service is not conducted by him, but is a corporate action in which priests, deacons, readers and laity have their appointed parts. Every instructed lay member of the congregation participates in this corporate worship in the way which he freely chooses for himself. Some kneel, others prostrate themselves, others prefer to stand.

Some take to their seats, but the latter are usually reserved for the aged and infirm.

There is no uniformity, or even order, in the movement of the Orthodox worshippers. Some come in late, others go out before the end of the service, many accentuate their prayers with the sign of the Cross and a bow. Others push their way through the crowd in order to light a candle in front of one or another of the sacred pictures. The presence of many small children, including babies in the arms of their mothers, makes the atmosphere of the church service still more informal; and yet Eastern worship is not chaotic, but solemn and well-shaped. It combines freedom with tradition, homeliness with awe-inspiring majesty.

The liberty enjoyed by the Eastern Christians is the fruit of their realization that they are all members of one big family, composed both of the living and the departed. For the power of death only partially interrupts the fellowship of its members, and is not able to rob them of their fundamental unity. Therefore whenever the Church of God is gathered together in an act of worship, it is the Saints and all the faithful departed who form the main body of the congregation, for they are the true worshippers of God, and the Christians who still live here on earth are only joining their company when they come to take part in a service. The strong corporate sense of the Christian East makes it easy for members of the Church to treat their participation in worship as a sharing in the life of the whole Body.

They come to the Liturgy as guests to a banquet, at which the Saints have the place of honour. This attitude explains the presence of so many ikons. The Christian wants to be reminded by these visible signs of his invisible hosts, and his first act when he comes into church is to

salute them by offering a burning candle, as a symbol of love and remembrance of his Christian fathers and forefathers. This act is often followed by reverently kissing the ikon. This custom corresponds to the ancient Christian salutation of the Kiss of Peace, which is still exchanged by the Orthodox at the Easter night service.

The Orthodox Christian goes to church not as a duty, but as a privilege; for by attending the service he can join the glorious company of the Saints. He realizes that whether he stays only a few minutes at the service, or spends several hours there, he is participating only very inadequately in the never-ceasing glorious worship of the whole Church of Christ. All members of the congregation are equally unworthy of being present at it, and yet all are equally welcomed by their loving Father and those elder brothers and sisters who have already entered into the joy of the eternal life. This attitude gives him the freedom and informality mentioned above. A prince and a beggar, rich and poor, a publican and a respected citizen, all have their place at this feast, and no one of them can claim a position of authority and honour, since that belongs only to the Saints.

The warmth, spontaneity, and family spirit of Orthodox worship are some of its greatest achievements, and are all derived from its corporate approach to church services. Side by side, however, with these positive attributes, it suffers from several serious defects. For instance, it does not stress enough the moral responsibility of the individual, and makes an insufficient appeal to the will of each Christian. The services are apt to carry the worshippers away into the realm of timeless joy and freedom, instead of disciplining them and teaching them methodically to apply Christian precepts. If a Protestant

service can degenerate into an intellectual discussion or dry moral instruction, and Catholic worship is in danger of becoming a complicated ceremony performed by the clergy and little understood by the people, Orthodox worship can become a beautiful concert which uplifts its hearers into the delights of heavenly contemplation, but does not press them enough to live out their faith in everyday life.

Such is the difference in approach to worship among Eastern and Western Christians. But in spite of the marked contrast in atmosphere, the liturgical material used in the services of both branches of the Church is very similar: for in both cases its main source is to be found in the Bible. At the same time the Eastern Church has, however, a richer collection of hymns than the West, and a greater variety of prayers, services, offices, and rites. More than twenty big volumes are needed for a complete presentation of all this liturgical wealth, and not even all parish churches have an entire collection of Service books. These are far from being a creation of the past, for new hymns and prayers are added to them.

The hymns and prayers can be divided into three groups, according to their use by the different orders of Church members. The first and largest group is composed of Psalms, Biblical songs, and Church hymns<sup>1</sup> commemorating the Redemption and praising the life and examples of holy men and women. They stimulate the worshipper to a sense of repentance, faith, hope, and love. The language used is highly poetical, and differs from the sober and restrained vocabulary familiar

<sup>1</sup> Hymns in the East are not metrical songs chosen at will from unofficial books; they form an integral part of the service and are carefully tabulated according to the feasts and seasons, like the office hymns of the Breviary and the chants of the Missal in the West.

to Western Catholics. It is typical of the Orthodox mentality that the largest collection of hymns and prayers is reserved for the use of the lay people. It is either sung by the choir or recited by the Reader, who takes a leading part in the service. He does not replace the priest if the latter is absent, as he can do in the Anglican Church at Morning or Evening Prayer, but acts as the spokesman of the lay order, and is often more familiar with the complicated construction of the service than is the priest himself.

The second group of Church prayers is reserved for the deacon, and consists chiefly of litanies, which occupy a prominent place in the services of the Eastern Church. After each petition the congregation or the choir sings either: 'Lord have mercy' or: 'Grant this, O Lord'. The litanies do not vary much throughout the liturgical year, and the deacon's part is therefore simpler than that of the laity.

The third and last group is that of the priest. It consists chiefly of prayers said silently, and of doxologies, which are recited in a loud voice at the end of the litanies chanted by the deacon. The priest's part is thus the most silent and least complicated of all three, and has very few variations throughout the liturgical year.

This distribution of parts in the service among the different orders of Church members stands in direct opposition to Western practice, where the leading part is reserved for the priest, and the lay-people's action is reduced to a few simple responses to his prayers and petitions. In the East the services are corporate actions in which all orders of the Church—bishops, priests, deacons, and laity—take their share of responsibility. The hymns and prayers are usually short, and are presented in such a manner as to provide a background for the personal

praises and petitions of each worshipper. The lay people do not just listen to prayers recited or composed by the ministers; they themselves pray silently on the theme which the liturgy suggests. Every service is a religious drama performed by the whole body of worshippers, who are so familiar with its symbolism that they can take an active part in the liturgy without needing to have prayer books in their hands.

The offices of the Eastern Church are similar to those of the West. The liturgical day begins at sunset with Vespers. Compline is said at bedtime; Nocturns at midnight; Matins and Prime at sunrise. The Eucharist is preceded by the recitation of Terce and Sext; None is fixed at 3 p.m. These nine offices are recited regularly in the religious communities, but parish churches use them only during Lent. Throughout the year Vespers are sung on Saturday night and on the eves of festivals, while the Eucharist, preceded by Terce and Sext, is celebrated on Sunday morning and on feast days. In the Russian Church Matins and Prime are sung overnight after Vespers, and this combined service is called the All-Night Vigil, though it lasts in fact only about two hours. In the other Eastern Orthodox Churches Matins is usually sung in the morning before the celebration of the Eucharist.

The cycle of the liturgical year is carefully and lovingly followed by Eastern Christians. Each service has a few parts which never change, such as the *Nunc Dimitis* in Evensong and the *Magnificat* in Matins. But the majority of the prayers and hymns vary according to the days and seasons. These movable sections of the Church offices can be compared to wheels of different sizes rotating at different speeds, in some vast and complicated machine. They provide the Eastern Church with an ever-changing

pattern of prayers and hymns which follow the prescribed rhythm of carefully planned worship.

First of all there are the days of the week. Each has its own theme: Sunday is the day of the Resurrection; Monday commemorates the holy Angels; Tuesday, St John the Baptist and the prophets; Wednesday and Friday, Christ's Passion; Thursday, St Nicholas and all Saints; Saturday, the Virgin Mary and the faithful departed.

The second cycle is based on eight tones or modes, each differing from the others, both musically and textually. On each Saturday a new tone is introduced, and this dominates the greater part of the offices for the whole week. It is replaced by the next tone on the following Saturday. This cycle covers a period of eight weeks, and provides one of the most conspicuous features of Eastern Orthodox worship.

Then comes the large cycle of the 366 days of the year, divided into twelve portions, according to the twelve months. Each day has its own saints and events to commemorate, and they are all marked by special hymns and prayers. On most days there is a choice of commemorations, and those responsible for the ordering of the services can select those themes which they think most suitable to the occasion. A special book, called the *Typicon*, gives rules and advice for the ordering of services and the selection of sets of hymns and prayers from this rich material.

There are two periods in the year when this elaborate system of recurring cycles is replaced by an entirely different type of prayers, hymns and music; these are the great seasons of Lent and Easter. One of the most stimulating features of Eastern Church life is the drastic change in the atmosphere of worship which these seasons

bring. Everything is altered—vestments, music, hymns, the very structure of the services, and even the behaviour of the congregation. In Lent the whole emphasis is laid on the need for repentance, fasting, and bodily and spiritual mortification. The services are long, and contain much reading, while the people express their sense of guilt by numerous prostrations and genuflections. Eastertide presents the sharpest possible contrast to Lent. It is a season of triumphant acts of praise to the Creator for His victory over the powers of sin and death. Everything is sung, the Royal Doors are never shut during the first seven days and kneeling is banned for six weeks, until Whitsun.

All the Eastern Orthodox Churches use the same prayer-and hymn-books and follow the same liturgical cycles, but they vary considerably in their music and local traditions and customs. Nevertheless their unity is essentially liturgical, and this is emphasized by the position which the Eucharist occupies in their worship. Holy Communion is the centre of their spiritual life, and the vehicle of power which makes of them one body, despite the varied and often conflicting national allegiances of their members.

# V

## THE EASTERN AND WESTERN SETTINGS OF THE EUCHARIST

THE Holy Communion (or *Holy Qurbana*, as it is called by the Oriental Christians including those of Malabar) is at the very centre of the life of every Christian Community. It represents the most sacred act of worship, a gathering of the faithful which elevates them into fellowship with the Holy Trinity and makes them one with one another.

The best introduction to the inner life of any of the Christian confessions is therefore through the channel of its Eucharistic offering. Our study of the Eastern and Western traditions can be considerably advanced by comparing the rites according to which they celebrate the Holy Communion. All of these spring from the same source, for they arise out of a desire, common to the majority of Christians, to obey Christ's command to break the Bread and to partake of the Cup, until He comes again (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Eastern and Western Christians have continued for almost two thousand years to gather round the Lord's Table in the sacred meal. But they administer the sacrament differently, in accordance with their distinct interpretations of the relation between individual and community, between spirit and matter.

In the West, the service of Holy Communion centres on the death of Jesus Christ, and is closely associated with the release from sin of those individuals who partake of it. Its actual form consists of the solemn presentation

of the bread and wine, which, after they have been blessed and the words of institution spoken, become the Body and Blood of Christ, the tokens of His own worship of the Father, the means of sanctification for Christians and of the redemption of the world. The culminating point of the Western rite is Divine intervention, bringing to men the means of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation with their Heavenly Father through the supreme sacrifice of His Son.

Both Catholics and Protestants follow a similar order in their services. At first the bread and wine are placed on the open altar, or Communion table. There is nothing special about them; they are ordinary material objects. But after the prayers are said and the offering is made, a radical change takes place, for this everyday world is touched by the Divine, and is transformed, elevated, and redeemed. According to Catholic theology this event occurs at the moment of consecration, when the bread and wine are changed through Divine action, and become the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

This act is called Transubstantiation, and is explained in the terms of the scholastic theology of the Roman Church as an alteration of the *substance* of the bread and wine, while their external appearance and all other natural properties are left unchanged.

According to Protestant belief the culminating point is the act of Communion, and it is not the elements of the oblations, but the soul of the recipient which undergoes the change and is identified with Christ in mutual self-giving. For many Protestants the Divine action is only indicated by the bread and wine, which are not themselves affected thereby, for it is only men who can receive the saving grace.

It follows from this that an attendance at the Eucharist without communicating seems meaningless to a Protestant; while a Catholic treats his communion as the fitting culmination of the whole action, which honours God and benefits the world independently of the number and spiritual state of those who partake of it by communicating.

The Anglican rite of 1662 is an attempt to meet both these points of view. The Consecration and Communion are brought into close connection by omitting those prayers which usually are said between them, and so they form together the culminating point of the whole service.

Thus in spite of all controversies and disputes among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants, they all follow the same line of approach when they celebrate the Communion Service. They emphasize the personal meeting between Jesus Christ and the worshipper; they distinguish in the same way between nature and grace; and finally, they leave the conduct of the service in the hands of a single individual, the priest or minister.

If we turn from the West to the East, we become at once aware that here the human mind looks at things from a different standpoint. The Eucharist, for an Orthodox Christian, is not so much an intervention from above, as the gradual revelation of the Divine Presence, which is never withdrawn from the temple, but is hidden from men outside the service by their ignorance and sin. The Holy Communion is therefore a unique and God-given opportunity for the purification and regeneration of the worshippers through their union with the Holy Trinity.

The Eastern service takes the form of dramatic action by which the whole life of the Incarnate Lord is re-enacted by the congregation. The priest, the deacon, and the laity, all have their distinct parts to play, and each

of these orders of the Church is essential for the proper presentation of this divine drama.

The Eucharist is divided into three 'Acts', each of which corresponds to a period in the life of Christ.

The first Act, the *Prothesis*, or Preparation of the Gifts, represents those unrecorded years which Jesus spent at home, hidden from the world.

The second, the *Synaxis*, or Assembly, known usually under the name of 'the Liturgy of the Catechumens', reminds Christians of the teaching and healing ministry of our Saviour.

The third Act, the *Anaphora*, or Offering of the Gifts, known as 'the Liturgy of the Faithful', commemorates the final events of Christ's life; the Last Supper, the Cross, His Death, His Resurrection, Ascension and the Sending of the Holy Ghost.

The setting of this divine drama is paralleled in Greek tragedy. The priest represents symbolically our Saviour; the deacon, assisted by the choir, like the Greek chorus, comments on his actions; whilst the congregation, like the devout participants of religious festivals in ancient Greece, identify themselves with the life of the hero. During the Eucharist the people remember Christ's nativity, see him come after his baptism to preach the gospel of salvation; hear his voice when the Scriptures are read, welcome him when he goes up to Jerusalem for his Passion. They are present at his Last Supper, contemplate his sufferings and death, witness the truth of his Resurrection, and salute His glorious Ascension.

The service itself evolves in a spiral movement, gradually revealing the divine presence, and bringing the worshipper at each turn a step nearer to communion with the Holy Ghost. There is no single culminating point in it, and it is even misleading to speak about any

definite moment when the consecration takes place or to use other expressions borrowed from the West. The belief in the 'Real Presence' throughout the whole service is based on the gospel promise that 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'. The Eucharist is therefore a gathering of the faithful, during which the risen Christ is revealed by the Holy Spirit to the body of worshippers, through the remembrance and actualization of the supreme sacrifice made by the Saviour for the redemption of the world. The congregation stand in organic unity with the universal Church and, what is more, with the whole of creation, and they therefore come to meet not merely their own Saviour, but also the Lord of Hosts, the Ruler and Creator of the universe. The Holy Spirit, who brings into being both matter and spirit, fills, purifies, and regenerates both material objects and the bodies and souls of men.

Everything is holy in the Holy Temple, for there God reveals his presence to his redeemed people. The sacred vessels, the bread and the wine set apart for the Eucharist, the book of the Gospel, the altar (called the throne), the figure of the priest, are all used as the vehicles of his presence, all serving as the focus of attention for the congregation and helping them to become aware of it. The bread and wine are treated as holy even before the consecration, since they represent Jesus Christ from the very beginning of the service; but so is the book of the Gospel on the throne, which is regarded with such reverence and awe that none except the celebrants may touch it.

The Orthodox Christians of the Byzantine tradition have four different rites of Communion called the Liturgies of St James, of St Gregory, of St Basil and of St John

Chrysostom. The last one is used on ordinary Sundays and week-days and is the one best known.

It begins with an elaborate preparation of the bread and wine, which is performed by the priest, assisted by a deacon and by some laymen. It takes place behind the screen on a special table called the *Prothesis*.

The Eastern Christians have preserved the ancient custom by which the bread and wine are provided by the members of the congregation. This is done in different ways by different national Churches of the East. In the Russian Church the practice is as follows: Every parish appoints some devout woman, usually a widow, to supply loaves for the Eucharist, and these she brings to church. Before the service begins, those who wish to do so can obtain one of these small loaves, and send it up to the priest together with their '*diptychs*' or lists of names of those they wish to commemorate in the Eucharistic offering. The priest takes a portion from each loaf sent up, and puts them on the paten. While this is done, the names are read aloud either by the deacon or by some lay person.

After the end of each Eucharist the remainder of the loaves is distributed among those present, whether they are communicants or not, and taken home by the faithful to those who are unable to come to church.

When the bread and wine are duly prepared, the public part of the Eucharist is announced to the congregation by an exclamation made by the priest: 'Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. The next part of the Liturgy is centred upon the preaching of the Gospel.

This is solemnly brought to the sight of all the people in a special procession, accompanied usually by the singing of the Beatitudes. The latter summarize to the Orthodox

the message of the New Testament. After this the Epistle is read by a layman, and the Gospel by a deacon or a priest. The sermon follows the Scripture lessons, together with the prayers for the particular needs of the congregation (for the sick, for prisoners, for the afflicted and for the departed).

In the Russian Church this section of the Eucharist ends with the dismissal of the Catechumens, or those who are not yet full members of the Church, after which the main part of the service begins with the so-called 'Great Entrance'.

This very impressive feature of the Eastern rite corresponds to the Offertory in the West, where it usually consists of nothing more than the placing of bread on the altar and the pouring of wine and water into the chalice, together with the offering of alms.

In the East this action has grown into a solemn procession of clergy, assisted by the candle-bearers, during which the elements prepared at the beginning of the service are first brought to the congregation, and are afterwards moved up to the throne and placed on it devoutly for the consecration.

The well-known 'Cherubic Hymn'<sup>1</sup> is sung during this moving ceremony. The next stages of the Eastern Eucharist resemble more closely the Western rite than its first part. They consist of the Creed, then the dialogue between the celebrant and the people, starting with the words, 'Lift up your hearts', the Sanctus, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', the recitation of the words of Institution, 'Take eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins', 'Drink ye all of this: this is My Blood

<sup>1</sup> 'Let us who in a mystery represent the Cherubim and sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn, lay aside all the cares of this life.'

of the New Covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins'. After the words of Institution have been said by the celebrant and confirmed by the 'Amen' of the laity, the Holy Spirit is invoked to come upon the congregation and the holy gifts. This invocation, the '*Epiclesis*', is of special significance in the Eastern Church, for only those who have been purified by the Holy Spirit can approach the life-giving and awe-inspiring mystery of the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit is not only asked to sanctify and change the bread and wine and make them the precious Body and Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, but is also implored to descend upon the gathered Church and open the eyes of her people to His perpetual presence.

After the *Epiclesis* some further prayers for the whole Church both in heaven and earth are offered. The 'Our Father' is recited and then the Communion begins. First the clergy communicate behind the closed 'Royal Gates', symbolizing in this way the hidden character of Christ's Resurrection, for no human witness was present at this turning point in the world's history. After the communion of the celebrant and of his assistants, the consecrated bread is put into the chalice, the Royal Gates are solemnly opened, and the lay people are invited to come up and receive the Sacrament. At this awe-inspiring moment the last veil of ignorance and sin is drawn aside. The transformed bread and wine declare to the gathered Church the victory of the Resurrection, and the bishop, or in his absence the priest, calls on the faithful to witness to its truth by partaking of the risen Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Those who draw near with faith, love and fear, receive the gift of eternal life, not only as individual members of the redeemed Body, but also on behalf of all others present; for all Christians

are members of one another and their unity is never closer than at this Divine Service. The realization of the interdependence of all Christians, living and departed, explains the constant references to the saints in the Eucharist of the Eastern Church. Their prayers are asked and those of the congregation are offered on their behalf. Jesus Christ during his incarnate life was always seen surrounded by His disciples and His followers, and when He comes to meet His people in the Holy Eucharist, He does not come alone, but in company with His friends, as the Head of a family of all those baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

In the East, the lay communicants receive the Sacrament standing. The consecrated bread and wine are given them together by means of a spoon. Only red wine is used, and some hot water is added to it just before the Communion. The words of administration are: 'The servant of God (*Name*) receives the precious and holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins and unto everlasting life'. When infants are communicated the words 'unto remission of sins' are omitted.

The service is brought to a close by the Elevation of the Chalice before the faithful, who prostrate themselves, saluting thus the Ascending Christ. After this the sacramental presence of the Saviour is no longer accessible to the congregation, and the participants leave the church, having received the portion of the non-consecrated bread as a token of the fellowship experienced by the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

The attitude of the Eastern Christian is externally more passive and yet at the same time more active than that of his brother in the West. He appears to have little part to play in the proceedings. He has no book in his hands, he does not sing the hymns, and he does not

stand up or sit down at various well-defined moments of the service. Often he does not even see the priest or deacon at all. From an outsider's point of view he may seem to be entirely cut off from the service, and reduced to a state of passive listening to the reading and singing of the celebrants and the choir. But this is not so. An ordinary layman considers his position the most privileged of all, for he can devote his undivided attention to 'living through' again the divine drama, undistracted by the need for external conformity.

The Eastern Christians pray in one of the Litanies 'for them that toil and for them that sing in this Holy Temple', for he is not only grateful to these members of the congregation for their labours, but he is also aware that they are so occupied with external things that they have less opportunity for giving their full attention to the service, and therefore need the spiritual support of the rest of the worshippers.

Such are the main distinctions in the celebration of the Eucharist by the Eastern and Western Christians. They all derive from differences of outlook. We may summarize this divergency under the following headings:

1. In the West, body and spirit are clearly distinguished, and there is a tendency to set them in opposition to each other; in the Christian East they are treated as interdependent parts of the same creation.
2. In the West, the individual occupies the centre of attention; in the East, he is always seen as a member of the community.
3. In the West, mankind is the main object of redemption; in the East the whole universe is brought within its scope.

4. In the West, Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Saviour is the appointed channel of approach to God; in the East, the emphasis is laid upon the Holy Trinity as the revelation of God's true nature.
5. Finally, the West likes clear, precise formulas; it is logical and analytic, and has a strong tendency to distinguish between essential and non-essential elements in religion. But the East treats religion more as a life than as a doctrine; it mistrusts over-elaborate definitions, and is not interested in discriminating between more or less essential elements of Christianity. It believes that the Church and its sacraments are Divine Mysteries, intelligible and morally stimulating to those who partake of them; but that they will always evade analysis by logical reasoning, since our intellect cannot penetrate into the depths of the relations between God and man.

In conclusion, some explanation has to be given about the Syrian Orthodox *Qurbana*, the form of the Eastern Eucharist best known to India.

This ancient rite differs at some points from the Eucharist of St John Chrysostom, used by the majority of the Eastern Christians, but represents essentially the same approach to the Communion Service as professed by other Orthodox Churches. The most arresting difference between them and the Syrian Christians is in the inner decoration of the Church buildings. Instead of an *Iconostasis*, (the screen upon which the pictures of Jesus Christ and of His Mother and the Saints are painted), the Eastern Christians in India use a veil; instead of

frescoes and ikons they adorn their churches with ornamental designs or various religious pictures of Western origin. The Indian Orthodox Church has also never developed that vigorous artistic tradition of its own painting and architecture, which has been one of the glories of the Orthodox Churches in other parts of the world.

This therefore makes its worship less typical of the Eastern tradition than one would expect, but in all other respects it represents the same corporate outlook which characterizes the liturgical life of all Eastern Christians.

Therefore the description of the Orthodox Eucharist contained in this book can also be applied to the *Holy Qurbana* of the Malabar Christians.

# VI

## THE SACRAMENTS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

If we turn to the other sacraments of the Orthodox Church, we shall perceive the same underlying principles which make its Eucharist so different from that of the West. The number of its sacraments has never been stated, nor has a precise definition ever been given of their 'matter' and 'form', or of the authority underlying each, as was done in the West during the Middle Ages. In the 17th century, by way of imitation of the Latin Church, the idea of seven sacraments was introduced into the Eastern Catechisms, but this number does not correspond with Orthodox tradition, for the Service Books contain more sacraments than seven.

The Orthodox Church offers to her members help, guidance and instruction on all occasions of their daily life. She accompanies them from their cradle to their grave, and the most effective means of assistance at her disposal are her sacraments, which correspond with the manifold needs of Christians.

In this chapter a brief description will be given of those which the East and West hold in common, and only those aspects will be stressed in which they differ from one another.

### BAPTISM

Baptism is not the first occasion where the parents and the newly born child meet the Church in the East. On the first day the priest visits the mother and her infant

and says special prayers. On the eighth day a name is given to the child, and another short service is held. On the fortieth day the mother brings the child to the Church, where it is solemnly taken from her by a priest and is offered to God as a new member of Christ's Body.

It is customary to baptize a child between the eighth and the fortieth day, and the Sacrament is in many cases administered at home and not in the Church. In the West baptism is primarily concerned with man and his salvation; in the East it has also a cosmic significance. It begins with the following invocation said by the priest: 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit always, now and ever unto ages of ages.'

This solemn opening appears in only two other Eastern services, Eucharist and Marriage, for all three are of special importance in bringing the creation nearer to its ultimate goal, which is to manifest the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity.

The first and longest part of the service deals with the consecration of the water. The grace of the Holy Spirit is invoked upon it in the following words:

'Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and there is no word which sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders. Before Thee tremble all the powers endowed with intelligence. The sun singeth with Thee, the moon glorifieth Thee, the stars meet together before Thy presence, the light obeyeth Thee, the water-springs are subject unto Thee. Wherefore, O King, who lovest mankind, come Thou now and sanctify this water, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and grant unto it the grace of redemption and the blessing of Jordan. Make it the fountain of incorruption, the gift of sanctification, the remission of sins, and the remedy of infirmities.'

These prayers imply that every baptism not only adds another member to the Holy Body of Christ, the Church Catholic, but also extends further the domain of the manifest Kingdom of the Holy Trinity.

The sanctification of one of the elements of nature, in this case water, constitutes yet another step in the gradual process of the redemption of the whole of life on earth—a process which, however, depends on man's willingness to co-operate with his Creator.

After the consecration of the water the oil is blessed, and the priest, dipping his fingers into it, touches various parts of the body of the person to be baptized, accompanying his action with the following words:

"The servant of God (*Name*) is anointed with the oil of gladness, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen (*touching the forehead*); unto the healing of soul and body (*the breast and the back*), unto the hearing of faith (*the ears*), Thy hands have made me and fashioned me (*the palms*), that he may walk in the ways of Thy commandments (*the feet*)."

The baptism itself is carried out by means of complete immersion which signifies the death unto sin and the resurrection of every Christian into a new life.

The words used are: 'The servant of God (*Name*) is baptized in the name of the Father, Amen, and of the Son, Amen, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.' The absence of the expression 'I baptize thee', which is used in the West, emphasizes for the Eastern Christians the corporate nature of this as of every other sacramental action. For all sacraments are administered on behalf of the whole Body of the Church.

### CONFIRMATION

This corporate outlook is further stressed by the manner of administering Confirmation, or 'Holy Chrismation', as it is called. This sacrament follows immediately after Baptism, and although it is the priest who anoints the newly incorporated Christian, the sacrament retains its episcopal nature, for the 'Chrism', or holy oil, must have been consecrated by a gathering of the Bishops of a self-governing Church presided over by their senior. Thus whenever the priest anoints with this Chrism he conveys the blessing of the united episcopate. The words used by the priest, as he anoints the different parts of the body, are: 'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit'—which are the same words used by the Jews, of circumcision.

The meaning of Confirmation is differently understood by the East and by the West. For the Orthodox Christian Chrismation is not the renewal of the baptismal vows, but a lay ordination, by which the Christian receives a special grace to participate, in his capacity of layman, in the administration of all other sacraments. These are corporate actions, and only ordained ministers and 'Chrismated' lay-people are authorized by the Church to share in their celebration.

The Consecration of the Chrism by the head of each national Church emphasizes the Oecumenical character of Confirmation in the East. It is a sacrament of Christian Unity, for all Church members are anointed with the same Chrism, and thus brought into the fellowship of the same body.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A heretic returning back to the Orthodox Church is also received into full communion through Chrismation.

The most important consequence of this Eastern practice is the status of communicant which it confers upon all infants in the Orthodox Church. From the beginning of their life they are allowed to communicate as members of a Christian family under the responsibility of their parents. Modern psychology recognizes the profound impact which the good or bad influences of a man's first years leave upon the rest of his life. The fact that children in the East share in the Eucharist from the time of their infancy binds them to the Church by stronger links than is usually the case in other denominations.

### CONFESsION

The first confession fulfils to some extent the same function as Confirmation does in the West. It provides an occasion for instruction, and usually takes place when a child reaches the age of seven. After it he receives communion under his own responsibility.

The Eastern attitude to Confession is again determined by their 'corporate-mindedness'. An Orthodox believes that his sins affect the whole body of Christians, because all are bound together by close organic links; therefore it is only after reconciliation with the Church has been effected that he dare approach the awe-inspiring and life-giving mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

The Confession begins with a reconciliation between the penitent and those who have suffered most from his shortcomings. The general custom of the Orthodox Church is that the penitent, before going to see the priest, visits his relatives and closest friends in order to ask them to pardon him. It is left entirely to the discretion of the individual whether he specifies his guilt or leaves it unsaid. Those who are approached usually reply by saying, 'God pardons you'; they refrain from taking upon themselves

the right of absolution, which belongs to God alone, but make it clear that as far as they are concerned no ill-feeling or resentment is left in them. Only when this part of the act of repentance is completed does an Eastern Christian go to church and there makes his solemn confession of sins.

The underlying idea of this is the belief that a sincere inward repentance, and even a reconciliation with those who have been directly wronged by us, are not sufficient. There remains the rest of the Christian community, which also suffers from the sins committed by each individual, and it is necessary also to put right this side of the account. Therefore the act of confession was originally made publicly, and although this practice is now reserved in the East for exceptional circumstances<sup>1</sup>, the whole Orthodox method of confession has faithfully preserved its original design.

The penitent does not kneel, but stands beside the priest facing eastwards. For the latter is regarded not as a judge placed on a seat of authority, but as a witness representing the Christian community. The penitent confesses his offences directly to God, helped and encouraged by the prayers of the Church. This is made clear by the priest, when he addresses the following admonition to the penitent before the latter begins his confession: 'Behold, my child, Christ is invisibly present to receive thy confession; be not therefore ashamed or afraid, and conceal nothing from me; but without equivocation tell me whatsoever thou hast done, that thou mayest receive forgiveness from our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold his image before us; I am only a witness to testify before him whatsoever thou shalt say unto me; but if

<sup>1</sup> Father John of Cronstadt (d. 1907) revived in Russia the practice of public confessions.

thou conceal anything from me, thou shalt have double sin: take heed, therefore, since thou art come for the medicine, that thou goest not unhealed away.'

The form of confession itself is left unregulated. Some priests ask questions in order to make repentance easier, others refrain from all questions. When the penitent has declared all he intended to say, the priest recites the following prayer: 'O Lord God of the salvation of thy servants, merciful, gracious, and longsuffering, who repitest thee of the evil, and willest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: forgive now, O Lord, this thy servant (*Name*); grant him the assurance of repentance, pardon and remission of his sins, and absolve him from all his offences, voluntary and involuntary; reconcile and unite him to thy holy Church through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom be power and glory ascribed unto thee, now and for ever, even unto ages of ages. Amen.'

The prayer ends with an absolution, which is different at present in the Russian and in the Greek Church. The Russian absolution is: 'May our Lord and God Jesus Christ, through the grace and compassion of his exceeding love, forgive thee, my son (here follows the Christian name of the penitent), all thy transgressions, and I, an unworthy priest, by the power that is given unto me by him, forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'

This form of absolution was introduced into the practice of the Russian Church in the course of the 17th century under Roman Catholic influence. The Greeks have preserved the original, which expresses much better the Eastern conception of the priest's part in the process of repentance and forgiveness. The Greek absolution is as

follows: 'May God, who pardoned David through the prophet Nathan when he confessed his sins . . . may the same God, through me a sinner, pardon thee everything in this world, and cause thee to stand uncondemned before his awful tribunal.'

The most striking feature of this absolution is the absence of any reference to the power of the keys, which has always played such a prominent part in the life of the Church of the West. The comparison between the confessor and the prophet Nathan is no less significant, for Nathan did not belong to a priestly order and yet was used by God as his agent. The Orthodox interpret the priest's part in Confession along similar lines. He appears in it under two different aspects: on the one hand he is God's messenger, whose task is to remind the sinner of God's omnipresence and omniscience; on the other hand he is a fellow-sinner who, through the warmth of his loving compassion, helps the penitent to arise from his spiritual prostration and to renew his combat with sin.

The priest in the Orthodox Church is a physician of the soul, and, like any good doctor, he is even keener than the patient himself to see him completely recovered. He is determined to use all the means at his disposal for the achievement of this goal.

A penance is not considered an integral part of Confession, and is seldom given. Its use is restricted to cases when the will of the penitent specially needs to be strengthened in the struggle against sin, or his grief for the sins committed seeks expression in some act of reparation and mortification, which he does not want to impose upon himself by his own decision.

The frequency of confession is left to the discretion of individuals. The general recommendation is to make it four times a year. In the Russian Church no priest

will communicate anyone unless the latter has been to confession. In other Eastern Orthodox Churches this close connection between communion and confession does not exist. In some Churches—e.g., in Serbia and Bulgaria—confession is usually made only when grave sin has been committed.

### ORDINATION

The corporate (or '*soborny*', as the Russians say) temper of the Eastern Church finds its most complete expression in the Ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops. The first part of the service consists in bringing the candidate into the midst of the congregation. The sub-deacon then asks if the Ordination may proceed, and the congregation is expected to reply by saying '*Axios*', or 'He is worthy (to be ordained)'; a unanimous reply is indispensable, for if there are dissenting voices the service cannot proceed any farther. The assembled clergy are then asked the same question, and the same reply is awaited.

After unanimous consent has been secured the candidate is brought to the Bishop, who lays his hands upon the head of an ordinand and recites the following prayer: 'The grace divine, which always healeth that which is infirm and completeth that which is wanting, is prophesying (or is designating) (*Name*), the most devout deacon, to be a priest. Wherefore let us pray for him that the grace of the all-Holy Spirit may come upon him.' The Bishop then raises the newly-ordained priest to his feet and loudly proclaims: '*Axios*' or 'He is worthy', and this is repeated three times by clergy and laity.

All Christians agree that Ordination is an act of the Holy Spirit, but different denominations believe in different modes of his operation. Protestants stress the inner

call of the individual to the ministry as the most essential part of ordination; Roman Catholics identify the call of the Spirit with the laying on of hands by a bishop, emphasizing that this is the only legitimate channel of the Holy Spirit's action. An Orthodox finds the call of the Holy Spirit expressed in the unanimous approval of the candidate by the body of Christians, gathered together for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. When the Bishop proclaims, 'The divine grace is prophesying', he confirms the fact of divine election, which has already taken place, and he seals it by the laying on of hands. 'The divine will is manifest when the congregation unanimously declares that the candidate is worthy to be ordained.

This conception of the nature of Ordination explains the following peculiarities of the Eastern practice:

- (a) that only one person of the same order can be ordained at the same Eucharist;
- (b) that the dissension of even one person makes it impossible to continue the service;
- (c) that Ordination administered by a properly ordained Bishop, but without the participation of the congregation, is null and void; this is because the power to ordain belongs not to the Bishop, but to the Holy Spirit, who acts and speaks through the unanimous voice and prayer of the redeemed congregation.

### MARRIAGE

The sacrament of marriage is known under the name of 'Crowning' in the Eastern Church. This is a solemn blessing by the Church of a man and a woman, with the intention that their new life together may be one of unity and concord. The pattern for their oneness is provided by the

example of Christ's union with His Church, and it is therefore treated as binding for ever.

The service itself combines some of the features of ordination with those of the Eucharist. The bridegroom and bride are solemnly conducted by the priest to the middle of the church, where the crowning takes place in symbolic representation of the union between Christ the King and His bride, the Holy Church. The priest blesses them three times with the words: 'O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honour'. Crowns are then placed upon their heads, and are worn till the end of the service. After the reading of the Epistle (*Ephesians 5: 20-33*) and the Gospel (*John 2:1-12*), and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, the bride and bridegroom both drink some wine from the same cup in token of their new unity. The priest then takes them by the hand and leads them three times round the lectern, while the choir sings the same hymns as those which are sung at the Ordination service. The similarity between the rites of Ordination and Marriage in the East expresses the belief that the clergy ought to live in the same unity and love with their parish as should exist between husband and wife in a Christian family.

The solemnity of this service emphasizes the sacredness of the union between men and women and the connection between the mystery of human love and the love which God has for his creation. The Eastern Churches of the Byzantine tradition nevertheless allow divorce and even remarriage. This practice, however, does not seem to the Orthodox incompatible with their high esteem for marriage. They believe that in marriage two human beings enter into such close organic relations, comparable to those of parents and children, that they are never dissolved even after death. It follows from this that, in

its ideal, marriage can never be repeated, but this high standard cannot be imposed upon every Christian, for there are numerous causes which make it very difficult for many members of the Church to experience the love and unity of the true Christian marriage. Some, for instance, find it difficult to remain single after the death of their husband or wife, others find their married life ruined by prolonged absence, insanity, imprisonment for life, or unfaithfulness of the other partner. In all these cases the Church, as a loving mother, condescends to the weakness of her children, and gives her blessing to a second marriage.

The service, however, is different from the glorious Crowning; it contains a clearly penitential note, for those who enter upon a second marriage have failed to preserve the purity of their first intention. The priest reads the following prayer: 'O Lord Jesus Christ . . . cleanse the iniquities of thy servants, because they being unable to bear the heat and burden of the day and the hot desires of the flesh, are now entering into the bond of the second marriage, as thou didst render lawful by thy chosen vessel the Apostle Paul, saying for the sake of us humble sinners: It is better to marry in the Lord than to burn.'

The penitential rite of the second marriage is used in the cases both of a widower and a divorced person. In order to make it clear that the second marriage is only tolerated, but not approved, the Church requires that both priests and deacons shall only marry once, and that they shall not choose widows for their wives. If they feel that they must marry again—and this is often a very real problem for clergy whose wives die while their children are still small—they are not condemned by the Church, but they are no longer allowed to exercise their

priestly functions. They often continue to work for the Church as readers or choir-masters.

### HOLY UNCTION

This is the sacrament of healing for spiritual and bodily infirmities. In recent years its application has been widened by the Russian Church, and its administration extended to cases in which people desire to be strengthened and purified in their spiritual and physical life, without being necessarily bedridden or suffering from mortal illness.

The service consists of seven lessons describing Christ's healing power, and each is accompanied by special prayers followed by an anointing of different parts of the body with oil. Whenever possible, more than one priest, preferably seven, join in the administration of this sacrament, emphasizing in this way the corporate nature of the healing service.

Besides these sacraments the Orthodox Prayer Books contain more than forty other rites and sacramental blessings, which cover all the needs and tasks of human life. The Church invokes the grace of the Holy Spirit upon both sacred and profane objects, such as churches, *ikons*, houses, fields, animals, and plants. Some of these ceremonies, like the great Blessing of Water on the day of the Epiphany (the feast of Christ's baptism in the Eastern Church), are sacramental in the full sense of the word; others are no more than solemn blessings bestowed either by the priest or by lay-people.

The Orthodox believe that the Church has received from the Holy Spirit the power to sanctify and purify all life, both matter and spirit, and wherever and whenever she operates through her members, the creation is brought under the sway of the Holy Spirit and becomes the vehicle of his life-giving and saving influence.

# VII

## THE TEACHING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

THE faith of the Orthodox Church is expressed in the words of the so-called 'Nicene' Creed, which is solemnly recited at the baptism of every new member and at the celebration of every Eucharist.

The Eastern Church does not recognise any other creeds, and does not use any Articles of faith. Therefore all those Christians who fully accept the teaching of the Church as summarized in the Oecumenical Creed share in substance the belief of the Orthodox.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation, those two cardinal truths on which rests the whole edifice of Christianity, have been preserved intact by the majority of Eastern and Western Christians. In spite of their schisms, quarrels and misunderstandings, they have not lost their unity on these fundamental points of their faith, and this is one of the most encouraging facts about the present divided state of Christendom and the best hope for its ultimate reunion. The stumbling-block which prevents co-operation is the question of the Church, its authority, its government and the relations between its departed and its living members. Here Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans and the various kinds of Protestants offer their own solutions, which clash with each other and keep them in different camps.

The Eastern view of the Church is distinct from the Roman and the Protestant, and in some ways more so

than these from each other. It is therefore possible to speak about the Eastern and Western interpretations of the Church, including in the latter features common to Catholic and Protestant theology alike.

The whole West has been brought up in the school of Latin culture and outlook, and has been profoundly influenced by it. The East is the pupil of the Greek tradition. The Western mind is analytic: it likes to scrutinize, to dissect, to classify; in its dealings with religion it tends to be logical and even legalistic. Eastern Christians, on the contrary, are more interested in synthesis, in drawing general conclusions. They look upon the world as one great organism; they approach the diverse manifestations of life as an expression of the same ultimate reality. The best introduction to the difference between the two mentalities is provided by the interpretation of the word 'body' as universally used by Christians in speaking of the Church. The West follows the Latin use of this word. *Corpus* means in Latin both an organic body and a legally established institution; whilst the East retains the Greek meaning of *Soma*, which can be applied only to living creatures. For them the Church is therefore primarily a Eucharistic community and not an institution; it includes the whole cosmos, and the relation of all who belong to it is substantially that of members of the same organism. These general observations can be further illustrated by the difference in teaching between the East and the West on such concrete points as salvation, church authority, the connection between Holy Scripture and tradition, the meaning of Episcopal ordination, the place of the Blessed Virgin in the life of the Christian Community, and the use of *ikons*.

### SALVATION

All Christians agree that salvation is a free and loving communion between God and man, which is made available to mankind as the result of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ is our only Saviour. But when the West wants to explain in more detail the meaning of salvation, it usually speaks about the pardon of the sins of an individual reconciled to God through the passion and death of his Son. Christ crucified, Christ dying on the Cross, is the usual picture of the Saviour seen by Westerners. The crucifix has become the symbol of their Christianity, and those Protestants who object to the use of it express the same idea by stressing the text 'Christ died for sinners'.

In the East, salvation is the grant of a new life, the life of unity, holiness and immortality, bestowed upon redeemed mankind through Christ's victory over death and through the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. For the East, Christ is the Saviour because he showed the way of a new life and proved by his Resurrection the power and truth of his teaching. It is typical that three popular pictorial representations of the Saviour in the East are Christ depicted as a teacher holding in his hands the Gospel-book, on which is written 'I am the Way'; the empty Cross of the Saviour, as the symbol of his victory over death; and Christ as '*Pantokrator*', the Lord and giver of life, seated on a throne as the eternal Ruler of the universe.

The East does not think about salvation in terms of the individual soul returning to its Maker; it is visualized rather as a gradual process of transfiguration of the whole cosmos, culminating in '*theosis*' or the deification in Christ of the members of the Church as representatives and spokesmen of the entire creation. The East teaches that

salvation for an individual is achieved when he becomes part of the redeemed community, and shares the gifts of the Holy Ghost given to the whole body. Man is saved, not from the world but with the world, because he is its guardian and master; he is saved, not apart from others, but with the rest of the Christian family, as one of its members.

This same difference marks the Eastern and Western approaches to the authority of the Church.

#### CHURCH AUTHORITY

The institutional character of Western Christianity makes its members much preoccupied with the problem of Church Authority. Violent controversies have been waged round this point in the past, and even now the West is still far from finding agreement. Roman Catholics believe that final authority belongs to the Bishop of Rome, Protestants find it in the text of the Bible, Anglicans search for it in the Holy Scriptures, as interpreted by the decrees of the early Councils, in their Prayer Book and in the Articles of faith. These diverse points of view have one feature in common: they all ascribe the final authority either to some document or to an organ of Church government, like the Pope or the Councils. The seat of authority appears as something concrete, external and clearly defined.

This whole way of thinking is foreign to the Eastern, and especially to the Russian mind. The famous Russian theologian Alexis Khomiakov (d. 1860) was bold enough to declare that the Church has nothing to do with authority; she is the Divine grace inhabiting free and reasonable creatures, who share in its gifts only as long as they live in charity and peace with one another and obey willingly the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Church rejects

altogether the attempts of the West to locate Church authority in one or another ecclesiastical institution. It is the Holy Spirit speaking and acting through the whole body of believers who is the teacher and guardian of truth for them. Each Christian therefore hears the voice of the Spirit; but because the same voice speaks to the other members of the same body, only unanimous decisions reached in an atmosphere of humble obedience and perfect concord can be treated as expressing the divine Will. The Orthodox believe that the Holy Scriptures contain the Word of God, not because they were written by Christ's disciples or by inspired persons, but because these books were given to the Church by the Holy Spirit as the true record of the teaching of Jesus Christ through the unanimous decision of the early Christians. The decrees of the Oecumenical Councils are accepted by the Eastern Church not because many bishops were gathered at them, not because they met by the order of the Roman Emperors or because the representatives of the Bishops of Rome were present, but because their decisions were approved by the Holy Spirit through the unanimous acceptance of their canons by the body of the Church. At the time when Orthodox theology was at its lowest ebb in the 17th century and Eastern Christians were hard pressed by Western controversialists, who urged them to define their idea of the seat of authority, some of the Eastern bishops who were trained in the theological schools of the West and under Western influence, maintained that the first seven Oecumenical Councils constituted the final authority for the Eastern Church. This statement was obviously most unsatisfactory, for it implied that the organ of authority had stopped functioning in the 8th century and could not be revived unless political circumstances made possible the convocation of another Oecumenical Council. The

deficiency of this answer was due to the failure of these Eastern theologians to realize that the Orthodox Church does not see the problem of authority in the same light as the West, and that therefore its members are unable to answer the question in the terms expected by Western Christians.

The same difficulty confronts Easterners when they are asked to formulate the relation between Holy Scripture and Church Tradition.

### CHURCH TRADITION

There was a tendency in the past to define Church Tradition as an unwritten heritage left behind by the Apostles, which thus formed a parallel source of authority, sometimes competing with that of Holy Scripture.<sup>1</sup> This point of view treated Church Tradition as something belonging to the remote past, as a domain of ecclesiastical archaeology known to a few learned historians, who by means of careful research could prove that this or that custom or teaching belonged or did not belong to the Church Tradition. Such an interpretation of tradition penetrated into some manuals of Eastern theology at the same time as the idea of the pre-eminence of the Oecumenical Councils. This opinion caused a great deal of confusion and raised controversies as to whether the authority of Holy Scripture was equal to or above that of tradition. In reality tradition has nothing to do with archaeology. Prof. G. Florovsky describes the Orthodox teaching on tradition in the following words: 'Tradition is the witness of the Holy Spirit, His unceasing revelation

<sup>1</sup> This refers only to that part of the tradition which is claimed to be derived from Jesus Christ himself (*Tradition Kuriaki*), as distinguished from the tradition of the Church (*Tradition Ecclesiastiki*).

and preaching of Good Tidings. For the living members of the Church it is not an outward historical authority but the eternal continual voice of God, not only the voice of the past but the voice of eternity' (*The Church of God*, p. 64).

Eastern Christians firmly believe that the Holy Spirit guides and protects from error those members of the Church who obey his will and live in unity among themselves. Generations of Christians succeed one another, new nations join the ranks of the Church, new forms of education are introduced, discoveries in science and in art are made; but the Holy Spirit keeps watch, and reveals the same truth to every age and race. There is therefore no better guarantee for Christians that they are following the right path than for them to preserve organic unity with the Saints, the holy men and women of the past generations who have lived in communion with the Holy Spirit. This is achieved in the East by means of the apostolic succession of the hierarchy.

#### APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

The question of Orders is one of the most controversial among Christians of the West, and it forms the chief obstacle to reunion between the Anglican and Free Churches.

There are two different doctrines about Orders in the West. Catholics believe that the Apostles transmitted to their successors—the bishops—the fullness of priesthood, with the right to delegate any part of its functions. Therefore only those Christians who have received this commission from the bishops can be treated as lawful ministers of the Church. The Apostolic Succession, according to this point of view, is an uninterrupted chain of successive ordinations going up to the time of the Apostles.

Some Protestants have repudiated this whole doctrine and substituted for it the conviction that the call to the ministry comes to an individual direct from God. The laying on of hands at a Protestant ordination is a blessing which the Church on earth gives to ministers in order to strengthen their resolve and introduce them to their congregation.

Other Protestants, including Lutherans and Presbyterians, try to pursue a middle course between the two extremes. They have given up the threefold ministry and do not any longer consider bishops to be the only officers of the Church who have the right to ordain others. Yet they insist on the need of a properly conducted ordination, and teach that this act is an indispensable part of the call to the ministry.

In the East the Apostolic Succession is understood as a living bond between the successive generations of Church members; it is a proof that, in spite of the constant flow of time, the unity of faith and life has been preserved within the body of Christendom. The East teaches that when one who is to be a bishop kneels in front of the consecrating prelate, in his person the local Church voluntarily gives up its isolation and merges its life into the wider fellowship of the whole Body. A bishop in the East, as an individual, has no special power to make priests or deacons; his rôle is to sanction in the name of the Catholic Church the ordination performed by the Holy Ghost, who acts through the unanimous decision of a local Church gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist. If the new minister did not receive the imposition of the Bishop's hands, it would mean either that the Church Universal refused to recognize the local congregation as its true member, or that the local Church had wilfully broken away from the wider fellowship, despising or ignoring the rest

of the Body. In both cases the bond of love would be violated, the continuity of life interrupted, the communion with the Holy Spirit endangered. In order to avoid all these dangers the Eastern Christians treasure the Apostolic Succession and faithfully preserve their bond of love with the Church of the Apostles and early Martyrs.

### CHURCH GOVERNMENT

A Westerner is likely to question the efficiency of the Eastern conception of the Church, for he is used to more disciplined and better organized forms of Church administration. He would feel lost in the informal, family atmosphere of Eastern Christians.

The system has, of course, its disadvantages, the most important of which is the frequent inability of the Eastern Church to maintain its independence under State pressure. This does not mean, however, that the Orthodox Christians voluntarily submit to secular control. On the contrary, their history reveals a stubborn, though often passive, resistance towards those secular rulers who have attempted to control the life of the Church. In spite of temporary setbacks and defeats, Eastern Christians have not been disappointed in their trust in the protective guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Without the centralized authority of the Papacy, without any Articles of faith, often without learned theologians, Eastern Christians, persecuted and oppressed, have faithfully preserved the truth of the Christian revelation and showed the firmness of their faith, their missionary zeal and many examples of holy and pure Christian life in ways not inferior to those of the better organized and educated Western Christians. The East has, in fact, maintained its loose unity more successfully than the West; though, like the West, it has sometimes broken it by

holding it too tight. The Orthodox have been supported through all their trials by their conviction that so long as concord and charity are preserved the Church has nothing to fear.

This emphasis on the interdependence of all Christians appears again in the expression given to the unique significance of the Mother of God for the life and salvation of all who are incorporated in the Body of Christ.

### THE VENERATION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

In order to understand the attitude of the Orthodox to the Mother of God, it is essential to see clearly the place of the Old Testament in their religion. The Old Testament is for them the story of the gradual training of mankind for the revolutionary event of the Incarnation. It was a slow and painful process, full of setbacks, during which on many occasions a misdirected human freedom impeded the realization of the divine design for man's deification.

Eventually a stock was picked which spiritually, morally, and physically was able to meet the challenge of the Annunciation. The Virgin Mary is for Eastern Christians the final fruit of this long process of selection; she is the human being nearest to God that has ever lived on earth, for she was able to become the Mother of the Incarnate Lord. But though she is the consummation of the faith, hope and sacrifices of the innumerable generations of Israel, she was nevertheless a perfectly free agent; she could have rejected the offer to collaborate with God, although her humility, purity, and faith enabled her to accept the Annunciation, and thus to become the final link in the chain which connects fallen mankind with the Saviour of the world. She is the representative of us all, and through her all the rest of mankind meet their Creator.

as their fellow-man, their Friend and their Redeemer. She is therefore not only the Mother of Jesus Christ, but also the Mother of all creation, the second Eve who repaired the fault of the first woman.

Eastern Christians venerate the Mother of God as the fulfilment of both Old and New Testaments, and as the human being who stands nearest to the Holy Trinity. Her name is constantly heard in the prayers of the Orthodox Church, her *ikons* or pictures are found in the houses of all devout Eastern Christians.

### THE IKONS

Many of these *ikons* are highly revered, and have been made the vehicles of special grace; healings and other exceptional manifestations of divine favour take place in connection with them, and some of them are called 'wonder-working'.

Nothing is more misunderstood by the West than the Eastern Orthodox attitude to the holy pictures. Persistent accusations of superstition against the Eastern Christians are based on their customs and practices connected with the veneration of *ikons*. The analytical Western mind draws a sharp line of demarcation between the object and its name, between the person and his portrait, between spirit and body. The East is more aware of their profound interdependence. To the Eastern mentality the name of a person forms a part of his personality; his portrait also stands in close relation to the man himself. The East believes that the Incarnation revealed the existence of an organic unity between the divine and the creaturely; it proved that bodily things no less than spirit can be the vehicles of divine action, and that both are able to respond to it, though in a different way. For an Eastern Christian the *ikons* 'represent' Jesus Christ, the Mother

of God, and the Saints, and the very word 'represent' implies that one can speak of some presence of the heavenly persons in their images. An Eastern Christian never identifies the person with its representation, but he believes that the spiritual meeting of Jesus Christ and his Saints with the members of the Church is deepened and strengthened in being focused in the *ikons*. Wood, paint and metal, transformed by art and prayer, can form a meeting-point between God and man, no less than between mind and mind; and holy souls departed aid this prayer of the eyes no less than that of the lips. The following illustration may help to explain this point. A piece of rough marble and the statue made from it, though materially identical, are not the same thing; the creative genius of man makes the stone into the vehicle of a new spiritual power capable of profoundly influencing other persons. If so much can be done by an artist, the prayer of the Church, the action of divine grace, the response of a Saint, can affect matter even more profoundly and transform an *ikon* into a source of help and inspiration for those Christians who come into contact with it; this is how the miracles are performed. The veneration of *ikons* is only another example of the sacramental principle accepted by all Christians. If water in baptism is essential to the cleansing from sin, if bread and wine at the Eucharist serve men's communion with God, then *ikons*, too, provide a special facility for fellowship between the Saints and members of the Church here on earth.

If the West thinks that the East is superstitious in its veneration of *ikons*, the Christian East suspects those who object to it of the dangerous heresy which believes that matter is something unclean and evil, and that the highest type of worship can dispense with it and be entirely spiritual. This for the Orthodox is a denial of the Incarnation and a

complete misunderstanding of the true purpose of human life. Man's task is to make the world holy, not to get rid of it. Men are not pure spirits; the Church believes in the resurrection of the body, and not in its final destruction.

Such are some of the most obvious differences between East and West. It is clear that these two streams of Christian tradition are needed to complete each other. Some Churches lay special emphasis on Christmas, others on Good Friday, but the Orthodox on Easter. All these three great phases of the Incarnation presuppose one another and find their completion and explanation in one another. Taken in isolation they lose proper meaning; if one of them is over-emphasized at the expense of another, this inevitably creates a one-sided and even distorted picture of Christianity. The same can be said about the present teaching of the divided Churches. It lacks fullness and final balance, and that is why the Christian East and the Christian West, instead of indulging in arguments and recriminations, should listen to each other in the spirit of charity and faith, and trust in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to lead them into all the Truth.

# VIII

## PEOPLE AND PRIESTHOOD IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

CHRISTIANS of various traditions would answer in different ways the question, 'What does it mean to be a member of the Church?' Many Protestants, for instance, would draw a line of distinction between a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of a Church. They would consider that what really matters is to have faith in the Saviour, and to walk in his steps; whilst membership would mean for them attendance at services and participation in the activities of one or another of the organized Christian bodies—something useful in itself, but not essential for a good Christian life ; they would point out that there are many people who follow Jesus Christ but do not belong to any of the Churches.

A Catholic would answer the same question in a very different way. For him membership of the Church is the primary condition of salvation, and only those Christians who obey its authority and regularly use the sacraments are its members, though membership admits of degrees.

An Eastern Orthodox approaches the question of the Church from neither of these two familiar angles. The Church for him is neither a local congregation, nor the God-established institution which controls his faith and provides him with the means of salvation. The Church is to him the divine grace revealed in the life of creation; it is the power which attunes men to God's will, and makes them capable of working together with their Creator.

An Eastern Christian believes that as a result of sin man has become a self-centred rebel who has fallen out of harmony with the life of the universe. The Church, by reconciling its members with the Holy Trinity, helps to restore the lost concord among men and within nature. To be a member of the Church means, in the East, to merge one's own life in the flow of grace coming from above, and by so doing to acquire those gifts of faith, holiness and humility which the Church offers through the sacred mysteries to all its members.

This approach explains why the Church appears to Eastern Christians under two quite distinct aspects. On the one hand, the Church is given by God; she is cosmic, objective, beyond the control of her members. On the other hand, she plays a most intimate part in their lives, and her voice is heard in the depth of their own conscience. As a drop of water reflects the rays of the sun, so the Church is the reflection here on earth of the light of the Holy Trinity, and each of her members participates in the glory and holiness of the new life.

The very word 'Catholic' (*Soborny*), by which the Church is described, denotes for the Orthodox 'togetherness', unity in freedom, the victory of harmony over chaos, and of love over hatred and fear.

This vision of the Church as the power of God controlling, purifying, and directing mankind and all creation, is a distinctive feature of the Eastern outlook, and provides a key to the understanding of the difference between it and the Churches of the West. It explains, for instance, why the Eastern Church is so intensely ritualistic and yet her lay people have a full share of responsibility for her life; why she is so conservative and yet offers so much freedom to her members; and why so much of her teaching is embedded in customs and family traditions rather than in catechisms and the writings of theologians.

The broad outlines of these customs are the same in all the Orthodox national Churches, but in detail they differ considerably, and in this chapter only those of the Russian Church will be described.<sup>1</sup>

There are three different channels which introduce a Russian Christian into the life of the Church.

The first is provided by his participation in the worship of his Church. The moving cycle of Christian feasts with their various rites and symbols helps him, in the course of each year, to live over again all the main events of the drama of Redemption, beginning with the Fall, reaching its climax in Christ's Death and Resurrection, and revealing its full meaning in the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon creation.

The second line is forged by those numerous services, rites and customs which the Orthodox Church offers to its members in order to sanctify and bless every side of their daily life, and all their relations with other people. Great events like birth, marriage, and death are incorporated into the main mysteries of the Church; but such occasions as starting on a new job or a long journey, the beginning of study, and other joyful and sorrowful happenings are subjects for Church prayers, and provide the material for special services celebrated by the Orthodox Church on behalf of its individual members.

<sup>1</sup> The customs and traditions mentioned in this chapter have been the object of fierce attacks by the Communists since their access to power in 1917.

They are, however, so deeply rooted in the life of the Russian Christians that many of them have survived the long years of persecution, and they reappear at once as soon as the prohibitive measures imposed by the anti-Christian Government are removed.

Whenevr and wherever Russians are allowed to participate freely in the life of the Church, they express their religion along the lines described in this book.

The third link is established by the advice which the Church gives its members to help them grow to maturity through a better understanding of themselves and of human nature in general.

Let us start with the first channel. Each Eucharist, and every Evensong or Matins, offers to an Eastern Christian an opportunity of taking his share in the presentation of the eternal drama of Redemption. The same purpose is achieved by the ever-changing scenery of the principal feasts, the joy and solemnity of which sharply contrast with the austerity and stirring sense of repentance brought about by the fasting periods of the Eastern Calendar.

Out of the vast number of its festivals the Christian East has selected twelve principal ones:

- (1) The Nativity of the Virgin Mary, or 'Birth-giver of God', as she is called (Sept. 8th).
- (2) Her presentation in the Temple (Nov. 21st).
- (3) The Annunciation (March 25th).
- (4) The Nativity of our Lord (Dec. 25th).
- (5) The Presentation in the Temple (Feb. 2nd).
- (6) The Epiphany or Baptism of our Lord (Jan. 6th).
- (7) The Transfiguration (Aug. 6th).
- (8) Palm Sunday.
- (9) The Ascension.
- (10) Pentecost or Whit-Sunday.
- (11) The Falling-asleep of the 'Birth-giver of God' (Aug. 15th).
- (12) The Exaltation of the life-giving Cross (Sept. 14th).

Easter, which is called the Feast of Feasts, is not counted among the twelve chief festivals, for it stands above them all. The East has four fasting periods. These are: Lent, which lasts seven weeks; the fast before the Feast of St Peter and St Paul (June 29th); the first fortnight in August preceding the Feast of the Falling-asleep of the Virgin Mary, and the forty days before Christmas.

Wednesdays and Fridays and the eves of great festivals are also fast-days in the Orthodox Church.

Each festival has its own rite, and many of them have special customs explaining in a pictorial way their meaning to the members of the Church, whether adults or children, educated or uneducated. Many of these customs have penetrated deeply into the homes of Eastern Christians, and provide an additional link between the worship of the Church and the daily life of its members. As an example, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, one of the most popular festivals among Russian Christians, apples and honey are brought to church, blessed, and distributed among the congregation after the Eucharist. This custom fittingly illustrates the vision of the beauty and glory of the world as it was shown forth by Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and will be again revealed at the end of history. For even in the state of its present degradation, nature is still full of goodness, and is capable therefore of producing such things as apples and honey, which remind men of the sweetness and goodness of the whole creation. There are many similar customs in the East which accompany other great festivals. They are especially colourful and striking during the periods of Lent and Easter.

Lent begins in the East on a Sunday night, which is called the Sunday of Forgiveness. After Evensong the priest solemnly asks his parishioners to pardon all his shortcomings and offences, and they in return ask him to forgive them. Then the members of the congregation address a similar request to each other, and the same thing is done afterwards at home. Thus, reconciled with everybody, Christians of the East enter upon the period of fasting and mortification. Lent makes a profound impression upon the life of all Church members; their food

is altered, their Church services, music, and vestments are radically changed. The rules of fasting are severe: meat, fish, milk, and eggs are forbidden for seven weeks:<sup>1</sup> the services are long and mournful, and include many prostrations. It is a time of purification, and reparation for evils committed in the past.

Eastern Christians choose usually one of the weeks of Lent for what is called in Russian *Govenie*. There is no corresponding word in English; *Govenie* means a period of self-examination, prayer and fasting, which ends with confession and communion. A person who starts *Govenie* is expected to spend his time as in retreat, though he usually remains at home. He attends all the daily services; he fasts rigorously, reads books of spiritual edification, gives alms, and seeks reconciliation with those with whom he has quarrelled. *Govenie* usually lasts for a week, and it involves real bodily privation. The Lenten services take at least five hours a day, and regular attendance means standing or prostrating oneself for the whole of that period. If Holy Week is chosen for *Govenie*, this involves even longer hours spent in church. The severity of bodily mortification is, however, mitigated by the supreme beauty of the Lenten services, by their unique dramatic quality, and by their musical appeal. Some of the highest achievements of religious poetry and music are found in the hymns of Holy Week, and many of the more lax Christians who only seldom go to church, choose this time for confession and communion, since it is difficult to remain unmoved by the power and beauty of the Lenten worship.

Lent ends abruptly on Easter Eve, the greatest feast of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The midnight service

<sup>1</sup> The rules of fasting are relaxed by lay people of their own choice, if their health or occupation makes their keeping impossible.

has often been described, for it has no parallel in the experience of other Churches. Matins begins by a procession which leaves the church, goes round the building, and returns singing the triumphant hymn 'Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tomb bestowing life'. Each worshipper procures beforehand a candle, and as soon as the procession starts the first candle is lit, its bearer then lighting that of his neighbour, and so on until the whole church is a blaze of light and warmth. There is no reading, and everything is sung to what seem almost like dance tunes, and the whole service is full of movement, life and joy. At its close the priest greets each parishioner with the threefold Eastern kiss, and the same greeting is exchanged between the members of the congregation. On their return home the Russian Christians have their Easter meal, with its special dishes served only for that feast.

Easter Sunday is unlike any other day in the year. There is no service in the morning, all ordinary customs and habits are brushed aside, and instead of usual greetings, everyone is welcomed with the words 'Christ is risen', and the Easter kiss is exchanged with everybody that one meets.

Because of the glory bestowed upon human nature by our Lord's victory over death, Russian Christians do not kneel in church during the period between Easter and Pentecost. Easter is the culminating point of the whole Church's year; all other Sundays are mere stepping-stones leading up to that unique day, and they are all therefore dedicated to the commemoration of the Resurrection. In fact, the Russian word for Sunday is 'Resurrection'.

If we turn to the second link—the special services—we find another important channel which helps to connect the life of the Church with that of its members. These

occasional offices are either celebrated in the church, or the priest, accompanied by a deacon, is invited to come to the houses of the parishioners. These services deal with events of personal or family life, but they are public in character, for their main purpose is to secure the prayers of the whole Church for the benefit of individual members. Eastern Christians do not expect the priest to take the initiative in these matters; they themselves ask him to come and pray with them, since he is their link with the whole body of the faithful. These services provide the most intimate contact between the family and the Church at large, and the popularity of a parish priest depends to a great extent on the way he treats them; if he takes them devoutly and as a matter of personal concern, he is certain to be loved and venerated by his congregation.

A particularly important place among these services is reserved for the commemoration of the departed. Special days in the year are associated with them, as well as the anniversaries of their death. These services are sung either in church, at home, or by the grave. The funeral service is one of the most moving and liturgically perfect offices of the Eastern Church.

The Orthodox Service-Book reveals also a particular concern for the blessing of man's labour. In the East agricultural work is still the predominant form of man's activity, and therefore these services are mainly connected with various stages of the cultivation of the crops. The Eastern Church has a keen sense of the rhythm of cosmic cycles; she reflects in her services the change of seasons which so profoundly affect the majority of men and the fruits of the earth on which depends their very existence. She has much in common in this respect with the religion of the Old Testament, and she incorporates also much of the ancient wisdom of pre-Christian paganism. This

preoccupation with the farmer's year does not prevent the Eastern Church from giving her full attention to the needs of individuals. Especially widely used are the services for the benefit of sick people, and the offices and rites which prepare men to meet death in faith and hope of life eternal.

The personal feast-days of each member of the Church are also great occasions. Everybody receives at baptism the name of one of the saints, who thus becomes his patron. This Saint's day is treated as the feast-day of the Christian who bears his name, and it is observed much more than the birthday. On his Saint's day a Russian usually receives communion and gives a party at home for his relatives and friends. He is congratulated, and good wishes are sent to him on that occasion.

These family festivals and special services bring the influence of the Church right into the centre of the Christian home; but there is still another and even more intimate sphere where the Church comes into close touch with the life of the individual. This is in its direction of his spiritual training. It starts with morning and evening prayers. A selection of these is provided for all Church members. Many people follow this traditional pattern, which has been tested for centuries by innumerable Eastern Christians of different nationalities and of various cultural levels, and it has proved its great spiritual value. These prayers were originally composed by the famous teachers of the spiritual life, such as St John Chrysostom, St Basil the Great, St Macarius of Egypt, and St Ephraim the Syrian. Some other prayers composed by modern Russian Saints and teachers are also widely used. Personal petitions and thanksgivings are added to these prayers.

Next comes the daily reading of the Bible. The lessons for the day are taken from the Epistles and Gospels:

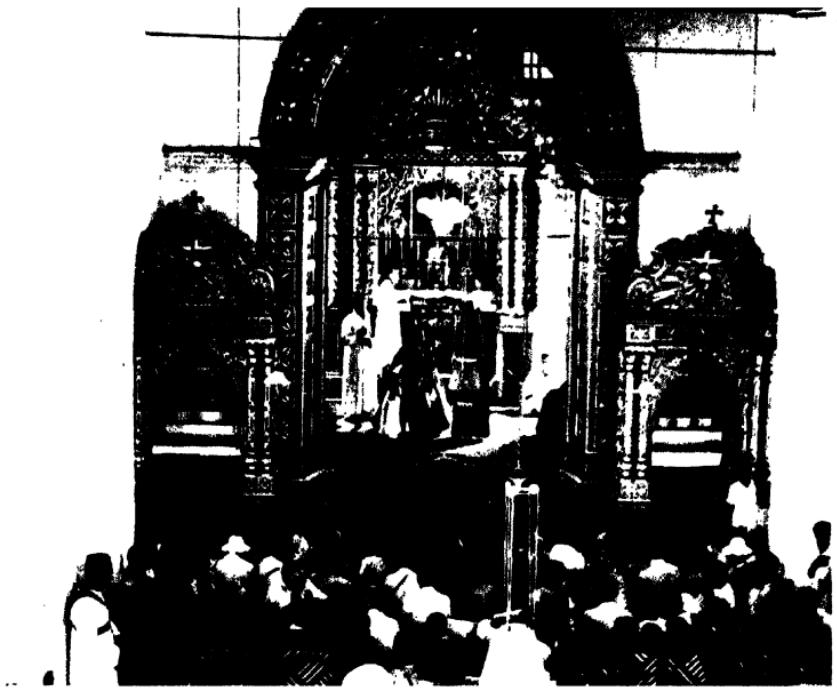
the Old Testament is read in Lent, but only in extracts. Keen Churchmen read the New Testament regularly; they use less the Old Testament, but the Psalms occupy a central position in their public and private worship.

Devotional books are widely circulated, and are graded according to the spiritual and intellectual level of the reader. They include lives of the Saints, pious legends, simple instructions on prayer or the use of the Sacraments, together with books giving Christian answers to the more perplexing problems of life. Advanced Christians read the writings of the great teachers of spiritual life, both ancient and modern. The writings of the early Fathers dealing with prayer and the inner life are better known in Russia than those on doctrine. St John Chrysostom (d. 407), who was concerned with conduct rather with dogma, is the most popular among the Greek teachers. In the homes of Christians, both educated and simple, one may see the five volumes of the *Philocalia*, a book containing extracts from the writings of the Eastern Fathers from the 4th to the 15th century, on prayer and spiritual perfection. A devout Russian peasant, man or woman, would find it quite natural to buy one of the works

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*Opposite*—Interiors of Orthodox churches in Travancore. *Above*: the Old Seminary Church at Kottayam, with His Holiness the Catholicos preaching during the celebration of the Holy Qurbana. *Below*: the Old Church at Kottayam, built during the 14th century. Note the three altars, the great hanging oil lamp, which is always kept burning, and the curtain which is drawn in front of the altar at certain points in the service. Above the altar on the left is the famous Persian cross, dated variously from the 4th to the 8th century, the oldest known relic of Christianity in India. The chests in front of the choir are offertory boxes.





Sacraments in the Orthodox Church. *Above*: the ministration of Holy Baptism. *Below*: part of the Marriage ceremony, when the bridegroom



His Holiness Moran Mar Basilius Geevarghese II, Catholicos of the East, who has been ruling head of the Orthodox Syrian Church of India since 1929.



of the Fathers and read it regularly, together with the Bible and the lives of the Saints.

The spiritual life of the Eastern Christian is built round the periods of *Govenie* already described in this chapter. Some hold one four times a year, others only once. Many lay-people live under the direction of a spiritual adviser, who may be a parish priest or a wise lay-man or woman, but is more often a monk or nun. Some of these directors acquire a nation-wide reputation; others are known only to the circle of their disciples. These so-called *Startsy*, or elders, are men of exceptional spiritual experience and wisdom, and often possessors of the gifts of prophecy and healing. People either visit them, or seek their help and advice by writing to them. As the Russian Church offers her prayers and gives her blessing both to spiritual and material needs, so these *Startsy* are ready to enter into the discussion of such varied problems as marriage, the purchase of a piece of land or a house, or migration to another part of the country. Their advice is that, not of a superior, but of an elder brother. They are treated by Christians as the spokesmen of the Church, for, having purified and cleansed their hearts and minds, they have become fit to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and to interpret aright the guidance which He offers to all redeemed people.

*Opposite*—Orthodox processions in Kottayam, which is one of the chief Christian centres in Travancore. *Above*: a procession in the streets to commemorate the 19th centenary of the coming of St Thomas. Note the richly caparisoned elephants and the processional crosses. *Below*: the funeral procession of an important lay leader, with many priests heading the cortège.

Among the various methods of mental prayer, the 'Jesus Prayer' is the best known; its words are: 'O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy upon me, a sinner.' This prayer is repeated at intervals, and sometimes, combined with rhythmic breathing, becomes a continuous intercourse between God and man, thus fulfilling St Paul's counsel—'Pray without ceasing'. It achieves the purification of heart and mind, the ultimate object of all the efforts of an Eastern Christian.<sup>1</sup>

The Orthodox Church provides her members with a definite outlook on life. Sometimes it is described as passive and otherworldly, but those who use these expressions have failed to understand the teaching of the Eastern Church. She does not reject this world; she is vitally concerned with it, and she calls her members to take part in its joys. But she equally calls them to face fearlessly their sufferings, privations and sorrows. The married life of the Orthodox priests with their large families, the well-run agricultural estates of the big Russian monasteries and convents, the keen interest of the *Startsy* in the practical problems of those who seek their advice, the public services, covering the whole round of human life and work, the blessing bestowed by the Church upon every kind of food except animal flesh—all this shows how fully and generously the Eastern Church accepts the goodness of creation and is prepared to share in all the gifts of earthly life.

But the Eastern Church is also aware of sin, of that deep-rooted disease which is everywhere and affects all the spheres of man's thought, action and feelings. And here the Eastern Church calls her members to relentless and uncompromising struggle. She teaches that man's

<sup>1</sup> See the description of the use of this prayer in the book called *The Way of a Pilgrim*, S.P.C.K., 1941.

mind, body and soul are seriously ill; therefore, fasting, mortification, spiritual exercises and, above all, the help of divine grace given in the mysteries of the Church are indispensable for success in the combat. The Orthodox Church offers to her members her well-considered advice and help. She knows well the interdependence of all human beings, and she asserts that man's relations with God can never be treated in isolation from his relations to the community. Emphasis on the corporate nature of salvation does not minimize the personal responsibility of each member. The Eastern Church breathes the air of freedom. She rejects any form of compulsion in religious matters, and makes an appeal to man's free will which makes him alone ultimately responsible for the choice between good and evil.

The faithful member of the Eastern Church, whether educated or uneducated, whether man or woman, is a harmonious, mature person, who has been brought up with a sense of personal responsibility and deep knowledge of man's dependence on God.

The Church is for Eastern Christians the embodiment of divine wisdom. She speaks to them through the inner voice of their conscience; she is their most intimate and personal friend, and yet she is also the power of divine grace given to the whole Universe through the life, death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word, and through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Creation. The Church embraces everybody and everything, but it is only the humble, the loving and the pure of heart who can benefit by her gifts and make full use of her power for the final victory of good over evil.

# IX

## THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF MALABAR

THE previous chapters of this book have dealt mostly with the main body of the Eastern Christians, with those self-governing national churches which call themselves 'Orthodox' and are in communion with the ancient See of Constantinople.

A certain number of illustrations of their worship, thought, and customs were taken from the life of the Russian Christians, who have preserved many characteristic features of Eastern Christianity more faithfully than other Orthodox, having been less exposed than the rest to the pressure of the West.

This picture of the Eastern Church will be incomplete, however, without a description of the Syrian Orthodox community of Malabar, which represents for India the Eastern Christian tradition.

It is probable, but not certain, that this Church was planted in South India in the first century by the labours of St Thomas the Apostle. According to ancient tradition he converted a number of Brahmin families and built seven churches on the Malabar coast. He is said to have died in A.D. 72, after twenty years of missionary work, as a martyr at Mylapore near Madras.

The descendants of these first Christians are known today as the Syrian Orthodox. They have remained faithful to their Apostolic tradition, in spite of their long isolation from the rest of Christendom, and in spite of the many tribulations which they had to suffer.

Of their early history little is known, as we do not possess reliable records. The Byzantine historians like Eusebius (263-338), Rufinus (345-410), Socrates (380-450) and others from time to time mention the Church in India, but they do not help us much, for it is not clear which part of Asia (or even Africa) they had in mind when they used the word 'India'. Many authors so named all countries round the Red Sea, including Arabia and Ethiopia; others treated all dark-skinned people as Indians. Nevertheless the scattered references to the Church in India which are found in Christian literature of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th centuries make it probable that Christian communities existed during that period also in the lands that we now call India.

During this time the original Apostolic Church was reinforced on several occasions by immigrants who came to India from neighbouring countries, either as fugitives from persecution or for commercial and other reasons.

The most important of these events took place in 345, when a considerable group of Persian Christians, led by a merchant called Thomas of Cana, settled down in Kerala. This group included Bishop Joseph of Edessa and several priests.

Some historians are inclined to consider that this Thomas of Cana is the true founder of the Church in Malabar; but the fact that the descendants of these immigrants still form a distinct community, called the 'Canaanites', among the Orthodox Christians, and do not intermarry with the rest of their fellow-Christians, makes this theory untenable.

The first eyewitness who described the Church in South India belongs to the 6th century. Cosmas Indicopleustes, or 'the Indian Voyager', wrote between the years 535 and 550 a book called *Universal Christian Topography*. In it

he mentioned his visit to Ceylon and to the Malabar coast in 522. He found in both places long-established Christian communities, which were connected with the churches in Persia, from which they usually received their bishops.

From the 6th century till the year when Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut, there is continuous evidence of the existence of the Christians in Kerala.<sup>1</sup> During these years they formed a well-organized Christian Church, the members of which enjoyed a number of privileges granted to them by local rulers, who treated the Christians on the same level as high-caste Hindus.

The doctrinal position of this ancient Indian Church and its relations with other Christians remains until today a matter of controversy. No document illuminating this problem has reached our time, and several conflicting theories are therefore maintained by historians. Some of them treat the Malabar Christians as Monophysites, others as Nestorians. India's neighbours, the Christians of Persia, Arabia, and Mesopotamia were during these centuries divided into several hostile factions. One of them was called the Monophysites, because its members rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) which described the God-man Jesus Christ as one Person who had two natures, divine and human. The Monophysites used another expression and spoke about the Incarnate Lord as having one nature (*monē physis*) which was both divine and human. The latter terminology did not satisfy the majority, for they considered it to be ambiguous, to the point of endangering belief in the genuineness of Christ's full humanity.

<sup>1</sup> For the detailed treatment of this question see Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, Manchester 1926.

Another party of the Eastern Christians was known by the nickname of the Nestorians, because they refused to condemn the teaching of Nestorius, the exiled Patriarch of Constantinople, who was alleged to have separated to such an extent the divine and human natures in Christ, as to make the union between the man Jesus and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity more moral than organic. Accordingly Nestorius (d. 451) refused to call the Virgin Mary the Mother of God, and preferred to describe her as the Mother of Christ.

As we saw above (pages 9-10) the Christians who followed these trends of thought became separated from the main body, which had its centres in the two famous Christian capitals, Rome and Constantinople. These divisions were far from being purely theological and were also the symptoms of national and political rivalries and tensions.

As far as one can guess, the Malabar Christians did not participate in any of these disputes which so adversely affected the members of the Church in other parts of the world.

The Indian Orthodox considered themselves to be the members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and welcomed as their brothers in Christ any visitors from abroad, without enquiring to which of the sections of the divided Church they belonged. In the same spirit of Christian hospitality and trust they also received the Portuguese in the 15th century, treating them as those who professed the only true religion of Jesus Christ, and hoping to find in them their friends and protectors.

These expectations however were not fulfilled, and the coming of the Western Christians opened a stormy period in the history of the Orthodox Church in Kerala.

The Portuguese were animated by a keen sense of their mission, and made strenuous efforts to convert Hindus to the Christian religion. Some of the Western missionaries who came to India under their protection had spectacular success. The greatest among them was St Francis Xavier (1506-52), who during his three years stay in Malabar baptized many thousands of people and founded no less than forty-five Christian settlements. His converts were mostly drawn from low-caste people, fishermen and Paravas, a caste who were engaged in the pearl industry.

These new Christians did not join the Orthodox Church, but became the members of the Latin community, which during the 16th and 17th centuries spread all along the South-western coast and had its outposts also in other provinces. Its centre was in Goa, the capital of the Portuguese possessions in India.

At first the Portuguese did not interfere in the life and administration of the Orthodox Church, which continued to be ruled by its Eastern bishops. The friendly relations based on mutual respect did not however last long. The Roman Catholic newcomers, convinced that obedience to the Pope and the acceptance of Latin customs were indispensable for all Christians, began to press the Malabar Church into conformity with the Western pattern.

Archbishop Alexis de Menezes, a man of courage and strong will, started an energetic campaign for the submission of the Orthodox to Roman discipline. At the Synod held at Diamper in June 1599, he succeeded in obtaining the consent of a large gathering of Indians to alter their traditions in accordance with the Latin rules. Eight hundred and thirteen delegates, representing clergy and laity of the ancient Church of Malabar, acknowledged Papal supremacy, agreed to the compulsory celibacy of

the clergy, and consented to important changes in their liturgy. The surrender was achieved however as a result of a display of military power which was put at the disposal of the Archbishop by the Portuguese Government, and was therefore resented by a large proportion of the Orthodox.

In 1653 this latent discontent led to an open rebellion, known by the name of Coonen Cross. The immediate cause which provoked it was the arrest and execution by the Portuguese of the Eastern bishop called Ahatalla or Ahtallah, who came to India from Babylon and tried to get in touch with the Orthodox Christians. The latter became indignant at the treatment of this hierarch, and a large gathering of them assembled at Mattancherry. There all of them, holding in their hands ropes tied to the ancient bent 'Coonen' Cross, solemnly pledged themselves to oppose the Portuguese domination over their Church and to return to the faith and worship of their forefathers.

A confused struggle followed this act of defiance. The Orthodox had no bishops in their midst and their leader, Archdeacon Thomas, was made the head of the community by the imposition of the hands of twelve presbyters. This irregular ordination gave the opportunity to the Latin clergy to win back the allegiance of many rebels, and since this incident the original community of Indian Christians became split into two sections, the 'Syro-Roman' and the Orthodox.

The overthrow of the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1663 enabled the Orthodox to invite an Eastern bishop to restore among them the Apostolic Succession.

In 1665 a Monophysite bishop, Mar Gregorius, arrived in South India from Palestine. He represented the Jacobite Syrian Patriarch of Antioch and since that date the majority of the Orthodox in Malabar have remained

in communion with that small and moribund section of Eastern Christians, instead of being connected with the majority which recognises as its senior hierarch the Patriarch of Constantinople.

The last hundred years have been an unsettled period for the Church in Kerala, marked by several further divisions.

The chief reason for this disturbed state has been the increasing pressure of the Western religious, social, and political ideas upon the Christians who wanted to remain faithful to their Eastern inheritance, and yet realized the need for reforms. As the result of these cross-currents, one schism after another occurred within the Orthodox community in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first took place in 1836, and was caused by the C.M.S. missionaries who represented the Protestant wing of the Church of England. The English started their work at Travancore in 1816 and were welcomed by the presiding Orthodox Bishop Mar Dionysius II.

The Malabar Church suffered at that time from the lack of properly trained leaders, and many abuses had crept into its life. The early English missionaries were animated by a sincere desire to assist the Orthodox, and the first decade of co-operation proved to be a fruitful and happy one. Unfortunately, as in the case with the Portuguese, this spirit of mutual respect was not maintained for long. The differences between the Eastern and the Protestant interpretation of Christianity, aggravated by the temperamental tensions between English and Indian national characters, led to a number of misunderstandings and conflicts.

In 1836 a group of the Orthodox left their Church and went over to the C.M.S. (Church Missionary Society) and so formed a new Protestant community in Travancore. In 1887, after ten years of litigation, another even larger

body of the Orthodox, this time led by the Bishops Mar Mathew Athanasius and Mar Thomas Athanasius formed a separate Church, now known under the name of the Mar Thoma Church. It retained the tradition of Eastern worship but incorporated several Protestant tenets, as for instance opposition to auricular confession, to prayers for the departed, and to the invocation of the Saints. The Mar Thoma Church has at present five bishops, one hundred and forty clergy, and 1,75,000 members, and is a well organized community, engaged in many missionary and educational activities.

In 1910 another split took place. This time both sides remained faithful to the Orthodox tradition, but they disagreed as to their relations with the Jacobite Patriarch, now resident in Homs, Syria. These Arab prelates, who live under very different political and cultural conditions from those of India, have interfered on many occasions in the internal administration of the Malabar Church, and not infrequently to the detriment of its prestige and unity.

As a result of this, a number of the Orthodox decided to secure the autonomy of their Church on the same principle as governs the relations of the different autocephalous Churches of the Byzantine tradition. The section which favours such a policy is called the 'Catholicos party'. It has about 4,50,000 members under ten bishops, and is predominant in the more culturally advanced district of Central Travancore. The 'Patriarch party', which is stronger in the Northern districts, still prefers to be under the direct rule of the Jacobite prelates from Syria. It has five bishops and is about 2,50,000 strong. The painful litigation between these two rival ecclesiastical organizations is still going on, but the hope of their reconciliation is not yet lost, for no doctrinal or liturgical difference separates them from each other.

The Catholicos party has lately shown many signs of spiritual renewal. The clergy are no longer recruited from only a restricted number of families; most of them receive a fairly good theological education, instead of being merely instructed in the conduct of worship, as was the case in the past.

Under the leadership of the Right Reverend Mar Petros Osthathios missionary societies like 'the Servants of the Cross' are active inside and outside Travancore-Cochin State. The Sunday School organization has branches in more than 200 parishes; women form their own fellowships like *Martha Mariam Samajam*, in order to deepen their spiritual life. Monasteries and convents like Tabor Mission and the Bethany Ashram have been started.

Bishop H. Pakenham-Walsh, formerly Anglican Bishop of Assam, and afterwards Principal of Bishop's College in Calcutta, assisted by his wife, founded a missionary Ashram in Coimbatore which unites in one happy fellowship both Orthodox and Anglican Christians. The Orthodox also participate in inter-church co-operation both inside and outside India.

The first woman President of the World Council of Churches was Miss Sarah Chakko (d. 1954), a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

In 1952 the Catholicate College at Pathanamthitta began its work. It aims at becoming not only a seat of higher education, but also the centre of Orthodox culture and learning.

The last secession from the Malabar community happened in 1930, when one of its leading bishops, Mar Ivanios (d. 1953), left his Church and went over to Rome, taking with him some 30,000 people.

Such have been the troubles which have recently disturbed the peace within the Orthodox Church in

India. These divisions, combined with the past period of missionary inactivity, have contributed to the creation of an adverse reputation for its members as quarrelsome and caste-ridden people. On account of these incriminations, Western critics of the Orthodox justify their attempts to split the Eastern Christians and to turn them into Roman Catholics or sectarians of various kinds. This hostile opinion however represents only a one-sided, and therefore biased, attitude to the Orthodox Church. In order to get a fair estimate of its importance, one has to remember that it is the only Church which is entirely governed and financed by Indian people, and can therefore be described as expressing their national approach to Christianity.

The main branches of the Catholic Church were formed in the atmosphere of the Mediterranean civilisation. Their members lived in the lands of cornfields, vineyards, and olive trees, where the four seasons of the year were taken for granted, and where the Greek and Latin philosophy and art were familiar to all educated people. The Malabar Christians are strangers to this type of civilization. Their religious and cultural background is that of Hinduism. Their food consists of rice and coconuts. They know only the dry and the wet seasons. Their Christianity is planted in a land that differs greatly from the Mediterranean world, and it is therefore not surprising that their Church does not look like any other Church, and that many of their customs and habits do not resemble the traditional ways of the rest of Christendom. Yet they profess the same religion of Redemption, and are genuine representatives of the Church of Christ on Indian soil.

The most striking feature of the Malabar Christians is their attitude to the language of worship. This

contrasts sharply with the policy pursued by the majority of the Eastern Christians.

The Churches of the Byzantine tradition have always laid special stress on the privilege bestowed upon every nation to worship the Triune God in its mother tongue. The missionary expansion of the Orthodox has been based on the translation of the Holy Scripture and of the service books into the vernacular. The work of salvation was conceived as affecting all sides of man's creative activity; so the 'baptism' of the language used by a community in its pre-Christian days and its transformation into a vehicle which could express the Christian faith and outlook, was considered an essential part of its redemption.

All these ideas remained alien to the Malabar Christians. No attempt was made by them, until the arrival of the European missionaries, to translate the Bible or the liturgical prayers into Malayalam. For more than sixteen hundred years they were satisfied with the Syriac text, which remained as incomprehensible to the ordinary Indian Christian as any foreign language could be<sup>1</sup>.

The other equally unusual feature of their church life was their treatment of the bishops. A bishop is traditionally regarded as the pastor of his flock, who knows his people and is trusted and loved by them. Unfortunately this idea has not always been maintained, and the history of both Eastern and Western Christians records the sad story of the manifold abuses of this elevated office. Ecclesiastical annals include bishop-potentates, bishop-ministers of the Crown, bishop-scholars, bishop-warriors, bishops who were absentees; prelates who either had no

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary however to remember that Malayalam, though an ancient language, only developed its own script and took its final shape at the close of the 18th century.

contact with their clergy and people, or were feared and hated by them.

The Malabar Christians did not follow any of these bad examples. They stood apart from the others in their peculiar misuse of the bishop's office, in that until the second part of the 17th century they had no bishops of their own, but relied solely on the ministrations of such foreign prelates as happened to visit their remote land from time to time. These visitors from abroad had no knowledge of the language, customs, and outlook of the people over whom they were called to preside for the time being. Their own background, mentality, and even credentials often remained unknown to their flock.

The Malabar Christians thus took no part in the doctrinal disputes which rent asunder the Church life of their neighbours in Western Asia. They maintained contacts with both parties and probably used both the Eastern and Western Syriac Rites, which distinguished the Monophysite and the Nestorian rivals. At the same time they made no contribution either to theological thought, or to the development of Christian art and worship. They were equally unproductive in the realm of ecclesiastical history. They greatly treasured, however, their Apostolic foundation, and preserved as a sacred inheritance the names and sites of the churches originally founded by St Thomas. They remembered even the names of the families from which he selected the first presbyters, and kept count of several migrations of Christian fugitives from the West, from Persia, and Arabia, who came to settle down among them. But this was almost all they considered worthy of commemoration. No attempt was made to keep a regular record of their ecclesiastical life, or of the visiting bishops, or of any other remarkable

events, happy or unhappy, which occurred during the sixteen hundred years of their lonely history.

Such are some of the special features displayed by the Malabar Christians. They are so unusual that it may be asked, how Christianity could survive under such peculiar conditions, and whether the religion professed by the Malabar Orthodox was the same as that known in Europe and Western Asia.

The information possessed by us about the Church in Kerala prior to the arrival of the Portuguese makes it clear that its members have always been genuinely Christian, and that they have kept intact the fundamental truth of Christianity; the belief in the Holy Trinity, in the Incarnation, and in the salvation of men through the God-man Jesus Christ. The Malabar Christians could remain members of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church without following the usual methods and customs, because, being Indians, they approached religion in Indian and not in Mediterranean ways.

Hinduism, for instance, has always kept its sacred scriptures in Sanskrit, and only the few learned men had therefore a direct access to the wisdom of its books. The rest were satisfied by the stories told by wandering ascetics, by the imagery of the temple sculptures, and by the mime of the sacred dances.

The Malabar Christians followed the same pattern. Only very few of them could read Syriac, but the story of the Incarnation and the Old Testament preparation for this great event were made familiar to the members of the Church through oral teaching. The Holy Qurbana with its rich ritual and deep symbolism of gestures achieved the same purpose; people were taught the truth of Christianity, not through a written word, but through dramatic corporate action.

This method had its own limitations, but it had also its own advantages, for it was in harmony with the spirit of Indian culture, and the Christian community could therefore continue its existence, even when contacts with the outside world were rare and precarious, and its members had to rely solely on their own limited resources.

The unusual attitude of the Malabar community to their bishops also finds its parallel in some other Indian customs. The Hindu sages are not necessarily eloquent preachers. They often appear to their followers as sacred silent figures, bearers of special power, the channels of communication with the Divine for the non-initiated ones.

Among the Malabar Orthodox the bishops performed a similar function. They were lonely figures who lived in special houses built within the Church compounds. They never entered into very intimate personal relations with the rest of the clergy and people. They represented the sacred element of the sacerdotal life, being responsible only for ordinations and the supply of Chrism. The current pastoral and administrative duties belonged to the Indian parochial clergy who baptized, confirmed, and gave Holy Communion to the laity. Religion was seen by the Indian Christians not as a set of intellectual formulas, but as a way of life. Their distinction from the Hindus was sacramental. They were the baptized people, the communicants at the Lord's Supper, and they followed another sacred law than that professed by the devotees of Shiva or Vishnu.

The faith of the Malabar Church was based not on teaching but on worship. This was the main source available to them for instruction, for inspiration, and for purification. The Indian Christians were not re-absorbed into the Hindu community, but remained faithful witnesses of the Incarnation because they

celebrated the Christian Mysteries and worshipped the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who reveals Himself to mankind through His only begotten Son and the Holy Ghost.

Yet another remarkable characteristic of theirs was the part played by family in their religion. India is a country where the family occupies a central position in the life of the nation. For the sake of the family Indians are ready to bear many privations, and for the same reason they are also prepared at times to sacrifice the interests of other people.

The Orthodox Church in Kerala accordingly became primarily a family concern. Hence the Malabar Christians' loyalty to their Church, their deep attachment to its traditions, but hence also their reluctance to allow newcomers (especially from the lower castes) to join their community. The frequent quarrels among them and their litigations are also the reverse side of the same vision of the Church as a family. Some of the Malabar Orthodox began to consider the Church as their private possession. For a long time many parish churches were treated as the property of one of the local families, and only their members had the right to serve in them as ordained ministers. Until the close of the 18th century the Archdeacon, the chief cleric, could be chosen only from the Pakalomattam family, which claimed that from its ranks St Thomas selected the first bearer of the office.

The last characteristic of the Indian mind inherited by the Orthodox was intellectual tolerance. This, however, influenced but little the rigidity of their social divisions. The disputes between the rival factions were as a rule followed by the suspension of any intercourse between former friends. In all these conflicts family loyalty took precedence over personal convictions. People

chose sides in accordance with the decision of the head of the family—the wife, and even grown-up children obediently following his lead.

In view of these characteristics, it was natural that contact with the representatives of the much better organized Western confessions produced much confusion and disruption in its ranks. Yet the period of adaptation to the new environment can be considered as being now almost complete, and therefore the Orthodox Church of Malabar is bound to play an increasingly important rôle in the history of the Church in India. It has a number of remarkable achievements to its credit, and it is essential to realize their value.

First among these is its uninterrupted tradition which goes back to Apostolic times. The Christians of Malabar have remained faithful to the light of the Gospel, in spite of long centuries of isolation, in spite of all the material advantages which their return to Hinduism could offer to them. They form at present the most genuinely Indian Church and enjoy the adherence of many devout members who take a prominent part in all the educational, administrative, and industrial activities of modern India.

The Orthodox have become especially distinguished in the last decades by the high quality of their episcopate. The former remoteness of their prelates has been replaced by a close fellowship between the pastors and their flock. The Orthodox bishops, with a truly apostolic simplicity, are accessible at all times to their people, and are trusted, respected, and loved by the clergy and laity. Their main function is sacramental, and their spiritual authority is universally recognized. The Orthodox Church also knows how to combine Christian faith with many traditional aspects of Indian culture and outlook. It has a much richer liturgical life than any of the Western-born

Christian communities in India, but above all it has preserved a Eucharistic practice and doctrine that reconciles and completes the conflicting interpretations of the Communion Service brought to India by the diverse branches of Western Christianity.

It is in this Eucharistic domain that the Orthodox Church of Malabar can make its greatest contribution to the other Indian churches. This influence is already felt in the efforts towards the revision of the Communion Service which have recently taken place among the Churches of Western origin, both in North and South India as well as in Ceylon. It is useful therefore to recall in conclusion the main convictions which underline the Eastern Orthodox approach to this most solemn and sacred act of Christian fellowship between the Triune Creator and His creation.

In the West, the Eucharist is often conceived in terms of a personal meeting between an individual and his Saviour, and great stress is laid on the question of the nature of the change in the elements, and on the authority of the minister who performs the service. The East sees the Eucharist as a corporate action with cosmic significance which regenerates its participants and makes them companions in the redemptive work of the Holy Trinity. It gives them strength to overcome their self-centredness, lifts them beyond the boundaries of nation, class, and family, and opens their eyes to the full meaning of the Incarnation.

To those who are ready to learn from it, every meal imparts a deeper understanding of man's nature and of his true relation to the rest of creation. The physiological process of eating and drinking continuously transforms inanimate matter into a source of free and creative activity. A prayer is offered, a poem recited, a symphony played,

a picture painted, and scientific truth is discovered, because men and women by eating and drinking, enable matter to surpass the limitations of time and space.

Eating and drinking also reveals an interdependence between human, animal, and plant life. Man needs food, and this reminds him that he is the apex of a pyramid to which all organisms belong, that he is rooted in the same material substance found in the remotest constellations and in the smallest particles. But man differs from the animals and plants in having to use his inventive mind to secure his food. His study of the seasons, the cultivation of plants, the breeding of animals, his determination to make nature obey his orders—all this arises out of man's dependence on food for survival. The same food also brings home to men that their fate is not only in their hands, but is controlled by the same Power that gives them the fruits of the earth and sends the wind and the rain. Such are the great lessons to be learnt from every meal; but its full significance is seen in the light of the Holy Eucharist, that unique royal feast for which all other meals are but a preparation.

The Eucharist contains all those elements of renewal and instruction that daily food offers to man. But it also has some additional characteristics essential to his spiritual growth.

The first is what Nicholas Cabasilas,<sup>1</sup> the great Eastern theologian and mystic of the 14th century, calls the 'human' character of the food offered at the Eucharist. Its participants are invited to receive the bread and the wine which are the produce of human toil, the fruit of the combined efforts of many men and women. At each Eucharist, not only do the celebrant and the communicants have their honoured place, but also all those who have

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Cabasilas, *Explication de la Divine Liturgie*, Paris, 1943.

sown the seed, gathered the harvest, ground the corn, baked the bread and brought it to the church; all those who have tended the vines, crushed the grapes and turned them into wine. The whole process of human industry is therefore sanctified through the Holy Eucharist. When Jesus Christ ordered his disciples to break the bread and to drink the wine, He blessed all human labour and elevated the work of man's hands and the inventiveness of his brain to the highest level of divine offering.

The second distinct element of the Eucharist is its universality. All humanity is invited to it, without distinction of race, nation, culture or class. A meal is the traditional expression of trust and friendship among those who take part in it. But the same meal can also be used as an instrument of separation; it can be a manifestation of family, class, or tribal allegiance excluding all outsiders. The Eucharist alone has no such limitations; it is a feast ordered by the Saviour for all men, and the only condition of admission is true faith in the Incarnation, confirmed through baptism and chrismation, and the readiness to forgive those who have offended against us. No greater blessing is promised to men than the grace which they can obtain if they approach the sacrament in the spirit of charity and contrition; and the greatest danger they can run is to share the sacred meal with hearts polluted by malice and pride.

The third element of the Eucharist is its significance as a covenant. It is a meal, but it has a special mystical sense attached to it, for it contains a commemoration of the Old Covenant and a re-enactment and bringing to fulfilment of the New Covenant. God calls men to work with Him, and at the Eucharist Christians respond to this appeal by remembering God's mighty deeds in the past, and the acts of faith and trust performed by

their forefathers. They accept their moral obligations towards their fellow-men and all created things, sure in their faith in the God who of old brought them out of Egypt, the land of bondage, and delivered them from sin by the Incarnation of His Son. The Eucharist proclaims the coming of the Messianic Kingdom, and invites willing and intelligent participation in it by all the faithful. It reminds Christians that they are the elect, since they have received the task of making the Kingdom of God to shine so brightly amidst fallen creation that the world can submit freely to the lordship of the Son of man.

Fourthly, the Eucharist signifies a sharing in the sacrificial death of Christ, and is the blessed fruit of His glorious Resurrection. The Eucharist is inseparably bound up with the Agony in the Garden, with Christ's betrayal, crucifixion, and death upon the cross. It makes clear that there is no easy road to the Kingdom, and that nothing short of complete victory over self can bring men into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. But formidable and terrifying as the forces of evil may be, they are incapable of holding down the Light under cover of darkness. They can seduce, but they cannot annihilate the image of God in man. They can poison the minds of Christians, but it is beyond their power to close the door to repentance or to nullify Divine forgiveness.

The Eucharist proclaims that the Christian belief in a God of love is not wishful thinking, but the assertion of cardinal fact, which makes certain the final victory of good over evil. God Himself shared with men all their sufferings and degradations in order to give them a tangible proof of His love for His creation, a love which does not destroy the freedom and independence of those whom He would have as his willing co-workers in the expansion of His kingdom.

Fifthly, each Eucharist is a cosmic drama in which the whole of mankind plays its appointed part. The eating of bread and the drinking of wine unites all human beings with the Body and Blood of Christ, creating an indissoluble oneness among all believers, and establishing a bond between the living and the faithful departed, and especially with the one who gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mother of God. Although subject to rivalries and passions, those who partake of the Eucharist differ from other men because, by the grace of God, they are the instruments by which the Holy Spirit enters into the body of mankind and through it, into the life of the world.

The members of the Church possess the power that can secure their victory over the temptations of the intellect and of the flesh, and grant them unity and concord. This power is contained in the Eucharist, which is the best defence the Church has against heresy and schism, for it makes its members one in Christ, and through Him brings them into the fullness of communion with the Holy and life-giving Trinity.

Finally, the Eucharist is the meeting between Jesus Christ and the believer, personal, intimate, unique. It makes the Christian a new being, by lifting him into the Divine Presence.

Thus the Eucharist is the foundation of the Christian community, the source of its strength and inspiration. A Church centred in the Sacraments ceases to be for its members merely an ecclesiastical institution or a convenient meeting place for people interested in religion. It becomes a divine leaven which slowly but surely transforms the earth, by deifying men and by sanctifying matter through the mystery of the Lord's Supper. The Eucharist creates a sense of partnership and confidence between men and nature, and drives away the fear of the

material world which haunts men outside the Christian community and makes most non-Christian civilization so barren in the field of science. Man's understanding of the universe and his ability to control it are the fruits of the Eucharistic experience. The conquest of space and time, the struggle against disease, oblivion and death, the whole growth of modern civilization is rooted in Eucharistic worship. In spite of the misuse of power, in spite of narrow-mindedness and quarrels, Christians possess in the Sacraments a force which has helped them to change the face of the earth, make mankind its true master and which, moreover, contains still greater potentialities for those who are ready to be reconciled with one another and lovingly obey the will of their Creator.

Such an interpretation of the nature of the Eucharist does not deny its usually accepted significance, the salvation of souls. But it considerably enlarges the sphere of sacramental action, and sees a man no longer as an exile on earth from his true home in heaven, but as a spokesman of the whole creation, responsible for the redemption of all other beings. Man's salvation, therefore, does not depend on his moral behaviour only; it also demands the full use of all his creative gifts for the work of transforming the earth into the Messianic realm.

This Eucharistic doctrine the Malabar Orthodox share with the rest of the Eastern Christians, and they can best make available to other Indian Christians the treasures of Orthodox spirituality by establishing sacramental links with the Byzantine Churches. Only through fellowship with them can the Indian Orthodox emerge from their present confinement to the one linguistic group of Malayalam-speaking people and to the narrow geographical area of Travancore-Cochin State.

The greatest handicap at present to the extension of their influence among wider circles of Indian Christians is the conviction of the latter that the Orthodox represent not Indian, but Syrian, Christianity, and that only Malayali people can be admitted into their community. The Eastern Orthodox Church includes among its members such varied nations as the Greeks and the Russians, the Rumanians and the Georgians, the Japanese and Finns, Serbians and Arabs. The Malabar Church ought to be one of the self-governing members of this world-wide federation and not an isolated body cut off from the main flow of life of the Eastern Christians. By restoring its unity with the rest of the Orthodox, the Indians will cease to be known under their present misleading nickname of the 'Jacobites', and will receive their proper title of the 'Orthodox Church of South India'. Such a restoration of communion will assist them in reconciling their present internal conflicts and in establishing more satisfactory relations between them and the Churches of the Western tradition.

The Orthodox Church of Malabar has a great future, and the first step on the road to its further growth ought to be the victory over the schism between the Oriental and Byzantine Christians, which has been the cause of so much bitterness and of so many defeats in the history of Eastern Christianity during the last fifteen hundred years.

# X

## CONCLUSION: THE REINTEGRATION OF THE CHURCH AND THE TASK OF INDIAN CHRISTIANS

THE Church is a universal community of people who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and believe that He is the God-man, the Incarnate Lord, who came to live among His creatures in order to reveal to them the true nature of the Triune Creator of the world.

The members of the Church are reborn in the Sacrament of Baptism, and are regenerated through the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and so are made a part of the company of the redeemed.

As there is only one God and only one Saviour Jesus Christ, so there can only be one Church. This truth is expressed in the words of the Creed, 'I believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church', but not all those Christians who profess this faith are in communion with one another. They are split into a number of independent confessions and denominations.<sup>1</sup> Some of them are strong centralized bodies, having their branches all over the world, others are small, and confined to one region only. Some of them are international, but committed to one particular theological tenet, others are restricted to a single nation; some are exclusive and refuse any

<sup>1</sup> A possible solution of this conflict between the Creed and the actual state of the Church is discussed in *The Reintegration of the Church* by Nicolas Zernov (London, 1952).

collaboration with their neighbours; others are willing to work together with other Christians.

The differences between the denominations are so many and so bewildering, that to most Christians the task of restoring the unity of the Church appears hopeless. The vision of Christian reconciliation is dismissed by them as a beautiful but unrealizable ideal. Yet such pessimism is not justified. There are signs that an increasing number of Christians are becoming aware of the scandal of their divisions, turning away from mere denunciation of their opponents and starting to seek mutual understanding and agreement. The formation of the World Council of Churches, the successful completion of the negotiations which brought about the creation of the Church of South India, and several similar projects are the fruit of this change of heart.

One must not exaggerate the extent of this new movement, but at the same time one has to recognize that whenever the members of the Church show a sincere desire for the restoration of peace and concord, their efforts receive God's blessing and assistance, which helps them to overcome the barriers which were considered insurmountable by previous generations.

One of the significant features of divided Christendom is that its seemingly chaotic fragmentation has in reality a recognizable structure. The great multitude of the present confessions can be classified under four main groups, which are distinguishable from each other both by their special gifts and by their limitations. The most remarkable characteristic of these groups is the fact that they all have their own geographical home, for they have all been influenced by the variety of race, culture, climate and soil in which the seeds of Christianity were originally sown. Moving from the East to the West, these

four interpretations of Christianity can be defined as the Oriental, which is located in Egypt, Ethiopia, Western and Southern Asia; the Byzantine, with its centres in Russia and the Balkans; the Roman, typical of the Latin peoples; and the Transalpine or Occidental, common to the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic nations.

These four groups have had different histories. The Latin one showed the greatest ability for expansion, and its outposts can be found in the remotest parts of the world. The Oriental branch, on the contrary, after a period of missionary activity (7th-13th centuries), was brought to a standstill in the 14th century and has continued to decline ever since. Many of its members became absorbed in the Islamic community, which can be regarded as a heretical outcome of Oriental Christianity. The faithful members of these Churches are reduced at present in many countries to small congregations living under the control of their Muslim overlords.

The Byzantine Church was at first supported by the Empire of Constantinople, but when this fell in 1453, it acquired a new protector in Russian Tsardom. Since 1917 it has entered into a stormy period of its evolution, and yet it is gradually becoming known and spreading its influence all over the Western world.

The Occidental, or Protestant, version of Christianity was for a long time submerged beneath the surface of the Roman Church. It secured the right to an independent existence only after the revolt of the 16th century known as the Reformation. Its manifestations could however be observed at a much earlier period. At present its adherents are found not only among the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic peoples, but also among the inhabitants of Asia and Africa.

In spite of all the vicissitudes of their history, their periods of success and failure, each type of Christianity has displayed a remarkable consistency in its characteristics and tenacity in the face of trials and dangers. The numbers of adherents may vary, some of them may transfer their allegiance from one branch to another, but each of them has its own contribution to offer which cannot be made by anyone else, including even its more successful neighbours. Only if each of these interpretations is accepted as an integral part of the Christian community, can the true picture of the Catholic Church in all its inspiring variety, complexity, and richness be properly grasped, and its amazing structure fully understood.

The Oriental and the Byzantine Christians, for instance, form together the Eastern half of Christendom; they are one in their emphasis on community, as contrasted with the individualism of the Western Christians. They have the same tradition of worship, the same shape of the Eucharist and a similar sacramental life. But at some other points they part company. The Byzantine Church then comes closer to the Roman, whilst the Oriental shares the characteristics of the Occidental or Protestant Churches. Both Roman and Byzantine, for example, highly value the ecumenical unity of their churches and refuse to be called by any other name except 'Catholic' or 'Orthodox'. They enjoy the contributions of art to religion, and maintain the balance between the divine and human in their doctrine of the Incarnation. The Oriental and the Protestant Christians are prepared to describe themselves by the names of their particular teachers; they are called Lutherans, Calvinists, Zwinglians, Wesleyans, Jacobites, Gregorians and Nestorians. They show greater loyalty to their local customs and traditions than to the rites evolved in the centres of

Christendom; they are much more restricted in the use of art in their worship, and have a tendency towards Unitarianism, which in the East has found its expression in Islam, and in the West in the anti-trinitarianism of some Protestant sects. Both the Oriental and the Occidental Christians easily split into sects, while the Roman and Byzantine Churches show a greater cohesion and sense of unity.

The Anglican Church occupies a unique position among these diverse interpretations of Christianity, for it combines in its fold those who share both the Roman and the Occidental traditions. It is therefore often called a 'bridge church', for not only does it accept the two Western types, but many of its members are also in sympathy with certain trends of Eastern Christianity.

Such is the picture of divided Christendom. The lines of demarcation are not arbitrarily drawn, but have their justification in the peculiar characteristics of each tradition. One must not be confused by the present dislocation of these main types, or by their clashes and fusions. One can find, for instance, Christians in South India who follow the teachings of Swedish Lutherans, and there are as many Jacobite Syrians in America as in their own homeland. Roman Catholics can be met in Greece, and some French congregations have joined the Eastern Orthodox Church; but these are anomalous phenomena, provoked by the disintegration of the Church.

Left to itself the Christian community takes a Roman pattern among the Latin Christians; it is Byzantine among the Greeks and the Eastern Slavs; it is Oriental in Asia, and Occidental in North-west Europe. There is nothing wrong in these distinctions, for God has given different gifts to different nations, and as there is no uniformity in the world created by the Holy Trinity, so there must be a

diversity of expression within the universal community of redeemed people.

The scandal in the sight of man and the sin against the Holy Ghost is caused by the failure of the representatives of different traditions to work together, to be assisted by, and to give aid to the members of their sister churches. Each one of them ought to praise God for its achievements, and at the same time to accept with humility its shortcomings.

Rome, for instance, has a supreme gift for organization. It excels above all other Churches in ecclesiastical discipline and in its eagerness to take responsibility for the spread of Christianity all over the world. The Occidental or Protestant Christians have the gift of intellectual honesty and moral integrity, and uphold the ideal of personal dignity and independence. The Byzantine Christians have preserved better than any others the Apostolic form of Christian truth. They possess the secret of unity in freedom (*sobornost*)<sup>1</sup> and have the most harmonious form of the Eucharist, which combines the glory of ancient Imperial tradition with the homeliness and spontaneity of family prayers. The gift of the Oriental Christians is their realization that the heart of the Church is in the local community, and that a Christian owes his allegiance primarily to this.

Such are the complementary virtues of these four types of Christian interpretation. Each of them however has its reverse side, which is often seen much more clearly by the members of other traditions than its positive achievements. Rome can be tyrannical and unscrupulous; Protestantism can be proud and self-satisfied, and suffers from dissension and schism, since each sect feels superior

<sup>1</sup> *Sobornost* is a Russian word meaning 'togetherness,' and stands for the word 'catholic' in the Slavonic version of the creed.

to the others. Byzantine Christians are self-absorbed in their own community, and indifferent to the destiny of others. They think that because they have preserved the proper balance in teaching and worship which is 'Orthodoxy', they can be exempted from other duties of the Christian vocation. The Oriental Churches have lost the sense of ecumenicity; they have so identified the Church and the community that they tend to subordinate Christianity to their national interests. In some of them even the call to priesthood has been usurped as the monopoly of some leading families, and the missionary vocation of the Church has died out to such an extent that no one except those born in their community can join it at present.

Reconciliation between Christians cannot be achieved solely by their own efforts. Only the Holy Spirit can bestow the gift of unity upon the divided members of the Church, but they become ready for the acceptance of the Divine Grace when they cease from despising and distrusting one another; when they stop their attempts to mould other Christians into their own pattern, and open their hearts and minds to a new vision of the Church, which being one, has many varied manifestations of its life, and welcomes the contributions which every nation brings into the common treasury of a catholic Christianity.

It is time for all Christ's followers to recognize their limitations and their need for the help and advice of their separated brethren.

Rome can learn, for instance, the art of unity in freedom from the Orthodox; only with the assistance of the West can the Eastern Christians become truly ecumenically minded. Both Rome and the East need the acid test of Protestant moral and intellectual integrity. The art of worship can best be improved by the Occidental

Christians through their contact with the Byzantine and Oriental Churches.

It is not the task of this book to discuss the ways and means of Christian reconciliation<sup>1</sup>, but it is proper to mention here the part which belongs to the Indian Christians in this movement. Their participation in it is of special significance. In the past they have been victims of Christian divisions, but they are now in a position to make an important contribution to the ending of these divisions; and already on many occasions they have demonstrated their desire for reconciliation.

Indian Christians still form only a small minority among their own people, and are split into a number of sects, the tenets of which have, however, neither roots nor justification in Indian history. These confessions and denominations originated under circumstances foreign to Indian life, and their founders quarrelled among themselves prior to their coming to the Indian people; but it has so happened that Indians could have no other access to the Gospel than through these sectarian channels, largely conditioned by Western controversies of the 16th and 17th centuries. Yet the Indian mentality requires a presentation of Christianity which reveals its truly universal nature and is free from those peculiarities which were caused by the one-sided development of the Church in Europe (and America) after its separation from the Christian East.

From time immemorial India's sages and mystics have pondered over the most profound questions about human destiny and the relation between man's spirit and the Absolute.

<sup>1</sup> For further treatment of this subject see the above-mentioned book by N. Zernov, *The Reintegration of the Church: a Study of Intercommunion* (S.C.M. Press, London, 1952), which contains a select Bibliography on reunion.

In this connection certain conceptions which have been widely, though not unanimously accepted by the Indian people, are significant. One conception is that of *karma*, with its accompanying doctrine of the transmigration of souls. According to this belief human souls, the emanation of the Divine Spirit, receive their bodies, and inherit whatever they do of wealth, temperament or station in life, in strict conformity with the law of retribution. All actions, good and bad, committed in one existence are rewarded or punished in the next; and souls return again and again to the material world until they reach a state of non-attachment, when the soul will no longer be born again. This is the Hindu conception of salvation (*moksha*), which is only attained when the individual loses himself by realizing his identity with the divine. Another very popular belief is that of the divine 'descent' (*avatara*), that is, of the periodic appearance of God among men in the disguise of some creature, for the sake of destroying the powers of evil and ignorance in the world.

Such conceptions have played a great part in the development of Indian religion, culture and social structure. They have not only inspired Indian artists, and given believers strength to face the perplexing problems of human life, but they also provide Hinduism with strong defences against Christian preaching. From the point of view of the Christian mission they are of great importance, since they are concerned with questions whose final solution can only be found in the light of the Christian revelation.

The belief of Hindus that man's personality cannot be understood merely in terms of his individual existence on earth can only be satisfactorily interpreted in Christian experience. Hinduism rightly holds that man's life does

not end with his physical death, and teaches that our thoughts and actions are often intricately bound up with motives and events unknown to our reason. But this is interpreted in terms of an impersonal law of *karma* and an agelong series of rebirths which the ordinary man cannot hope to escape. The same facts of human inequality and suffering are quite differently interpreted by Christianity. Christians are convinced that man's whole existence is in the hands of a God of love, who judges according to His all-embracing wisdom, taking into consideration our inheritance and all our circumstances, and rewarding each man according to his use of the grace which he has received. The Gospel is the good news of salvation (above all, salvation from sin), which is freely offered to all men in Jesus Christ and experienced in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Popular Hinduism thrills to the thought of the divine *avatara*, but refuses to face the claim of Jesus Christ to be the only true Incarnation, the Word made flesh. Hindus are not concerned with what seem to them irrelevant questions about historical fact, and so do not distinguish between verifiable facts, poetical fictions and pure legends. Some modern Hindus extend the doctrine to include all the founders of great religions, such as Confucius, Buddha and Mahomet, despite the fact that these teachers either ignored or else categorically denied the very possibility of divine incarnation. A further weakness in the Hindu doctrine is that in relation to evil it only expects the divine *avatara* to destroy the wicked, and seems to be unaware of the power of redeeming love (*Gita* IV, 8). Thus, apart from inspiring fervent individual devotion (*bhakti*), the doctrine remains for the most part ineffective.

As long as the Indian people remain outside the Christian Church, their progress is hampered by unwillingness

to recognize the uniqueness of the individual or to distinguish between fact and fiction. Just as each divinity is worshipped under a multitude of different forms, which hide rather than reveal the nature of God, so each soul in its countless reincarnations passes from form to form without consciousness of its continuity. This is bound to weaken interest in human progress and to retard the development of science. Only the Gospel can give the true answers to the questions raised by India's wise men and seekers, and therefore Indian culture can best hope to find its fulfilment in the fellowship of the Church. On the other hand Christians all over the world can greatly benefit from the contribution which the Indian people can bring into the Church.

The shallow spirituality of so many modern Christians, their superficial attitude to the mystery of life and death, their preoccupation with the external activities of the Christian community at the expense of its mystical and ascetic tradition, are defects that could be considerably improved with the help of a vigorous Indian Church, which had incorporated into its thought and worship the wisdom and religious fervour of its gifted people.

The deep-seated Indian abhorrence of violence, their genuine respect for holiness and wisdom, their appreciation of tolerance and compassion, are virtues much needed by other Christians, especially by those whose gifts lie more in the sphere of action than in the realm of contemplation. The emergence of an all-Indian Church would be an event which might have a decisive influence upon the whole evolution of contemporary Christianity, and could especially assist it in its most vital task of the reintegration of divided Christendom. It is here that Indian Christians can perform their greatest service. The process of reintegration is an indivisible movement,

and by starting it in their own section of Christendom Indians can influence the rest of the body, however remote or disconnected its other sections might appear to be at a cursory glance. In the present movement towards reconciliation among Indian Christians it is possible to discern several distinct stages which are all interwoven one with another, and may have far-reaching repercussions in the life of the divided confessions in other parts of the world.

The first one, in which a considerable advance has been achieved lately, is the merging of diverse Protestant denominations into one Episcopal Church, which has a fully developed sacramental life, and yet retains the achievements and characteristics of Reformed Christianity. The Church of South India is the first step in that direction. Several similar schemes of union are now under discussion. Their importance surpasses the local benefits which the end of sectarianism can bring about to Indian Christians. They have a truly universal significance, because denominations which could be reconciled on Indian soil cannot remain for long indifferent, still less, hostile, to each other in their home countries.

The second stage of this process is only at its very beginning. This is the drawing together of the united Episcopal and Reformed Church with the ancient Eastern Churches of India. Only when this unity is achieved can one begin to speak of 'the Church of India' instead of the Churches in India. Only such a reconciliation will remove the stain of foreignness both from the Eastern and the Western traditions, and facilitate the birth of a genuinely national Christian community which will no longer be called by names suggesting a non-Indian origin.

The reformed Eastern Mar Thoma Church has an important part to play in this process, and it is likely that

the first organic link between the Eastern Christians and the Protestants in India will be established by its members. But the Mar Thoma Church, though it has preserved the Eastern tradition of worship, has absorbed into its life and doctrine so many Protestant notions, that its reunion with the West, beneficial as it is certain to be to both sides, cannot be treated as a genuine reconciliation between the Orthodox and the Protestant Churches.

This would take place only if the Syrian Orthodox Church of Malabar entered into communion with the Indian Episcopal Churches of the Western tradition. The Syrian Orthodox in Kerala in spite of their numerical weakness, hold therefore a key post in the present divided state of Christendom, for they better than any other body can set in motion two movements of reconciliation of supreme importance for all Christians.

They are well placed for the establishment of a sacramental fellowship between the Eastern and the Protestant Christians, and they occupy an equally favourable position for the termination of another disastrous split, this time between the Byzantine and the Oriental Churches. They have never been involved in any of those bitter conflicts which marred the relations between the Greeks on one side and the Copts, the Armenians and the Jacobite Syrians on the other. They have never committed themselves as fully as the other non-Chalcedonian Churches to the doctrinal statements objected to by the Byzantine Christians, and besides they have never been affected by racial competition with the Greeks. They are therefore eminently suited to make the first move, which might easily be followed by other Oriental Churches.

The reconciliation between the Eastern and Western non-Roman Churches is however not the completion of reunion tasks in India. Even if their agreement is secured

there remains the Roman Church with its large and, well-organized body of followers. The reunion between the Christians of the Papal obedience and the reunited Churches of India has to be treated therefore as the final stage in this momentous process. It looks, however, so remote at present, that it is unwise to attempt to describe it in any detail. One can only say that, because the branches of the Roman Church in India are not likely to be able to act on their own responsibility, their conduct will depend on the decisions taken in the Vatican. Rome often appears to outsiders as an institution which never alters and never moves, but this is not true. Like every living organism, the Roman community is a growing body subject to manifold changes. One can hope therefore that the reunion between Eastern and Western Christians will have a decisive influence on the policy of the Roman hierarchy<sup>1</sup>, and will change its attitude to the Ecumenical Movement.

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to argue that the task of reconciling the Eastern and Western traditions, as far as India is concerned, has already been achieved within the Roman community, which has congregations following Latin, Syro-Roman and Jacobite rites. The Roman Church is at present willing to allow the Eastern Christians to retain all the peculiarities of their worship, on condition that they recognize the infallibility of the Pope and the primacy of the Roman See. This policy is based on the conviction that a liturgical rite can be dissociated from its doctrinal basis, and that the difference between the Eastern and Western interpretations of Christianity is limited to ritual. In reality it goes much deeper, and affects also the conception of the Church. Eastern worship arises out of an interpretation of the relations between community and individual which clashes at some vital points with the present Latin insistence on a centralized ecclesiastical authority.

The history of the Uniate Churches illustrates this point, for there exists among them a continuous tension between Eastern Liturgy and Roman theology. The longer the Uniate Christians have been under Roman obedience, the less they have been able to preserve the

Such are the tasks confronting Indian Christians, and such are the world-wide repercussions which the successful fulfilment of these tasks is likely to produce.

The Indian people stands at the cross roads at present; secularism and revived Hinduism, Christianity and Communism, seek to attract their attention. The country has been awakened to a new life but it has not yet chosen the direction for its forward movement; and on such a choice, not only the future of India, but also the destiny of many other nations will depend, for India occupies a leading position in the world, and no one can remain indifferent to the cultural and religious evolution of its people.

Great is the responsibility of the Christian minority in India, great are its opportunities, but formidable also are the obstacles confronting of it. The task of reconciliation, involving victory over the spirit of provincialism and sectarianism, is pressing its claim with the utmost urgency upon the members of the Indian Churches. All other Christians ought to be vitally concerned for the success of these efforts and to offer their encouragement and assistance; for if the Indian Christians achieve their union, they will be able to open the door of the Church to

original Eastern pattern of their services. The recent policy of Rome of forbidding any further Latinization of the Uniate Churches is charged with explosive; the Vatican will sooner or later be confronted with a dilemma, either to allow the Uniates a greater freedom in ecclesiology, or to impose upon them conformity with the Latin rite. The Roman solution of the problem of reconciling the Eastern and Western traditions is therefore an illusory short cut to the real goal. It lacks stability and consistency, and this will continue to be so, until Rome gives up its claim to represent alone the fullness of the Church, and ceases to identify the catholicity of the whole Church with its Latin interpretation, which in practice is narrowed down to the theology and worship of the counter-Reformation period.

millions of other Indian people, and to help the members of the Church all over the world to bring their divisions to an end; but if they fail, the progress of reintegration will be retarded everywhere.

India is facing today many difficult problems, and her people can find their solution only by submitting to the redeeming power of the Cross and by sharing in the joy of Christ's Resurrection. Her people need, as do the rest of mankind, the grace and guidance of the Incarnate God-man, for in Him alone men find their full and perfect union with the Holy Trinity and an understanding of their own nature.

All Christian nations can be enriched and stimulated by a closer fellowship with the Indian people, but the Indians themselves can join them only by sharing the life of the Universal Church, the pillar and foundation of the truth, the light that illuminates the whole world, and so reveals to men the task assigned to them by their Creator.

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